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**China on the Periphery:
Transitions of Chinese “Orientalism”
from Oliver Goldsmith to Thomas De
Quincey**

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research programme; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

Bo-Yuan Huang
June, 2014.

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Desmond Bo-Yuan Huang
June, 2014.

Abstract

This project contains six chapters, and looks carefully at the original generic forms and cultural environment of publication. This first part will include the general introduction to the shaping and the mapping of knowledge of China in the pre-Romantic period. Daniel Defoe's *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), as a widely-read, popular romance, would serve as an important text that provides a peep into contemporary British and China from an economic and materialistic perspective. French texts of Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748) and Voltaire's *An Essay on Universal History, the Manners, and Spirit of Nations* (1756) would also be included and carefully examined. Although these two works were not written in English, still both held strong presences in the circle of British intellectuals at that time. And although both works were based on the Jesuits' accounts, they ended up yielding rather different results, providing almost opposite contemporary opinions about China. In Montesquieu's idea, China, as an absolute despotic country that produces nothing but economic and social stagnation whereas in Voltaire's depiction, China is guided and governed by high moral and philosophical standards. Both writers' works showcase an unsettling debate on how China is and should be portrayed in the mid-eighteenth century. This would provide a special foreground that nurtures the later discussions on China, such as the idea of political economy in Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) and the general public's ambivalent sentiments towards China, which would lay a strong foundation for the development of this research project.

The second chapter takes on Oliver Goldsmith's *The Citizen of the World* (1762) and his other essays and periodical articles to explore how Goldsmith, while echoing back to the aforementioned two writers, takes good advantage of the satirical form of a Chinese philosopher-travellers' account, not to work as a mechanism of producing sheer alienation and foreignness, but to provide his social observation, in order to assess both domestic and exotic cultures from a parodist's point of view. Although Goldsmith has constantly been accused of plagiarising European works, and although he did not offer an effective solution to the conflicting nature of Chinese vogue in his contemporary Europe, he was one of the most influential figures in his time who actually dove into the popular cultural

phenomenon, suggesting the possible marriage and amiable relationship between the domestic and the foreign cultures with a slight amount of disbelief, concern, and sarcasm.

Chapter three deals with Lord Macartney's Embassy to China between 1792 and 1794, and looks closely at the travel narratives both by embassy members and by Lord Macartney himself. Several visual representations of China would be examined in this chapter, including some of the most well-known works by caricaturists such as James Gillray and George Cruikshank before and after the embassy. William Alexander, the embassy's draughtsman, also brought home numerous first-hand portrayals of China, allowing the British public to see the non-distorted images of China. Despite the unsuccessful diplomatic journey, the Embassy returned to Britain with some immediate and direct accounts of Chinese society that were not from a Jesuit source, which defined how common English public comprehended and perceived China from then on. Whether Lord Macartney performed the ritual of "kowtow" ignited a heated series of deliberations about China: if it is a country of absolute despotism or of enlightened despotism? And if China has been stagnant in terms of technology, economy, and culture? Would China be able to open up for foreign trades and diplomacy? These debates strongly shaped the subsequent discussions of China in England in the nineteenth century.

Chapter four scrutinises several Charles Lamb's *Elia* essays (1823, 1833) and his correspondences with Samuel Taylor Coleridge and with Thomas Manning who was a leading Sinologist and later a member of Amherst Embassy. Coleridge's fragmental masterpiece "Kubla Khan" is also included to illuminate the phenomenon of popular oriental fantasy, while the correspondences from Manning and Coleridge are incorporated to examine Lamb's major source of creative ideas. Particularly, Lamb's most celebrated essay "Old China" would serve as a perfect example to further dive into not only the writer's personal obsessive attachment to chinaware but also the remarkable reflection on how the vogue of chinoiserie and the oriental luxuries helped form the concept of "taste" and gave rise to the new consumer ethics of the middle class in Britain. This would also position the consumption of chinoiserie in the luxury debate in the eighteenth century, and how this phenomenon gradually died away in the nineteenth century.

Chapter five approaches Thomas De Quincey's most famous yet notorious work, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1822, 1856) and political essays in relation to Anglo-Chinese diplomacy. Influenced by the emergence of racial theories and the trend of switched focus from China to India and the South Sea, De Quincey's ideas of China reflected the new-found colonist supremacy of Britain, and how the military intervention should be carried out in order to, eventually, disenchant the old charm of China that was thoroughly built up by and within the European imagination. The stagnation in politics, economy and society of China was gradually and then generally accepted in the first half of the nineteenth century, and De Quincey's proposal that Britain should wage wars against China can also be seen as a violent means for Britain to actively take on the role of global power and colonial country that seeks overseas expansion, as well as a means for China to transform.

The last chapter will conclude that "Chinese Orientalism" is not a by-product of "Romantic Orientalism"; rather, "Chinese Orientalism" should be viewed and understood as a series of images of China that have been *romanticised* by European imagination—whether they are positive or negative—and they peaked during the mid-eighteenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries. "Chinese Orientalism" is, again, not a simplistic idea, but a complex, triangular relationship with politics, commerce, and culture between England and China. This shift in the balance of opinions was accompanied by a change in emphasis and approach in European construct of China, from an Enlightened preoccupation with and admiration of the political, cultural and philosophical supremacy of China, to a Romantic engagement bifurcated between intimate consumers' attachment to the chinoiserie and oriental luxuries, and then to a racialised "Other" and a stagnant and tiresome country of despotic polity that was in a desperate need for British rationalism and military intervention as a means to revive. With the aim of opening testing and giving great contextual specificity to China within larger discourses and representations of the East, this thesis tracks this process of transformation and the balance of opinions. And it is my hope that this study will in some measure contribute to the heightening of this interest, especially at the time when Europe and China are bound not only culturally but also politically and financially.

Rationale

This thesis is an attempt to not only evaluate the objective accuracy of the construction of China in English literature from the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries, but to scrutinise the origin, roles and significances of the representations of China within the British literary texts and cultural context. The principal methodology comprises the critical analysis of texts, including literary works, historical accounts and travelogues. The general thesis is to present an insight into the complexity of elements, cultural flows and ferments in the development of an intellectual history of a civilisation. The initial hypothesis consists of the assumption that the British (as well as European) interests in China have undergone a tremendous transition: mainly from a need for an intellectual stimulus to more general materialist- and then imperialist-driven motives, which, with the prevailing curiosities in various social classes, would accordingly correspond to the changes of interests in China.

Since late Middle Ages, the images of Chinese culture have emerged in Europe as a strong force that could help to repair, restore and even renovate European cultures. The Confucian ideas were widely circulated and more often than not, cited as a stimulant to the intellectual community in Europe in general. Apart from this, the material abundances of China were often informed and described by travellers, tradesmen, and missionaries, as countless invaluable treasures. Among various accounts, *Il Milione*—commonly known as *The Travels of Marco Polo* in English—is a travelogue written down by Rustichello da Pisa who recounted Marco Polo's journey to Asia, Persia and Indonesia, and, more famously, his journey to China and his unique experiences being at the court of Mongol leader Kublai Khan between 1276 and 1291. Although the book has long been questioned about its accuracy and authenticity¹, Polo's account was, and still is, fascinating to a wide readership. Polo's journeys were at first motivated by economic ventures in Venice, aiming at securing domination of Italian, as well as European, powers in the East.

¹ The debate still continues until recent days. In a new publication by economic historian Hans Ulrich Vogel in 2013 informs new evidences in currency usage, salts as monies, and revenues that can support the idea that Marco Polo was actually in China, and his romance to China was not entirely fictional or merely based on hearsay. Vogel's refreshing perspectives manage to provide a convincing argument for this special case. See Hans Ulrich Vogel. *Marco Polo Was in China: New Evidences from Currencies, Salts and Revenues*. Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2013.

Nevertheless, the book of his journeys lends itself to a cultural optimism of the Far East, an account so vivid that its cultural impact was almost immediate, powerful, and then enduring.

As the material abundances drew the attention of the European world, Polo's tales spurred the age of European overseas exploration. The wide popularity of the book was gained throughout Europe, and interests in Asia and China were swiftly mounting. Because of the collapse of the Yuan Dynasty and the Mongolian power, Polo's overland route—or "Silk Road", as named by many others—was nearly cut off, and it enhanced the difficulties for European travels to Asia, and above all, China. Then the Black Death in the fourteenth century came along, which not only devastated the European world but also blocked travels and trade. Also, the emergence of the Ottoman Empire in the mid-fifteenth century restricted the possibilities of trading with Asia, as that multi-national and multi-lingual empire was expanding its own commercial powers. These reasons became the biggest obstacles for Eurasian trades on land. Although it would take another century until Rafael Perestrello became the first-ever European to reach China via sea route in sixteenth century, Polo's descriptions inspired numerous voyages, opening up more possibilities to the expansion of European mercantile powers, and of course, the more constant communication with China.

Among these new-found maritime discoveries and expeditions, Spain and Portugal were the first to take over the overseas expeditions to the rest of the world, and Christopher Columbus, among many explorers and travellers during this period, was the most famous name that was encouraged and urged by Polo's travels. Polo's enthusiasm not only worked as a powerful and essential precursor for geographical exploration and expansion, but also it served as an indicator for the upcoming flush of religious missionaries to different regions, particularly Africa, America and Asia. The active participation of maritime exploration saw the dawning of the Age of Discoveries, a period of time when Europe positioned itself as the centre of the world, and attempted to map the world with its presupposed knowledge with the hope to open up dialogues with numerous countries of foreign cultures. Within the calibre of the European reach, China served as one of the most prominent and promising sources that consequently inspired European debates and reflections on its own

cultural significances against the rest of the world. In the earlier age, Europeans were more—and mostly—interested in Chinese materials. Porcelains, silk, and tea were among the few that aroused European curiosities. In the Age of Discoveries, however, the European fondness for Chinese materials still played a major role, while the interests in China gradually moved onto religious, cultural and intellectual topics. After the Portuguese explorer Jorge Álvares reached China in 1513, there were more direct contacts between Europe and China. In 1540, the Society of Jesus was created in Rome, Italy, and ever since then, the Jesuit missionaries zealously reached out to the rest of the world. The maritime activities allowed the Spanish and the Portuguese to gain and control some establishments in south-eastern Asia, which in general facilitated the Jesuit missionary works in the Far East, and China, among other countries, was considered to be a strong base for the missionary work due to its vast population. As early as 1546, the Jesuit missionaries Francis Xavier made the effort to enter mainland China, but failed to do so as he died on a Shangchuan island off the coast of Canton, the only point where Europeans were allowed to stay for seasonal trades alone. Not until a few years later when the Portuguese finally established a small settlement in Macau could the missionaries began their work in China. Nonetheless, even though these missionaries were eager to spread their religion, the language barrier stopped them and they could only start from a small number of Chinese people who could speak both Chinese and Portuguese. Soon, these missionaries found this insufficient, and felt the strong need to send missionaries to master the language of Chinese. In 1579, accordingly, Michele Ruggieri was sent to Macau, and was soon joined by Matteo Ricci in 1582. Ruggieri and Ricci's works were difficult at first. In the hope of creating a Sino-Christian civilisation that could survive and grow in the Buddhist- and Taoist- predominated China, they had to figure out how to adapt to China's religious and cultural context. Apart from Buddhism and Taoism, Confucian ideas were prevalent among the learned, which, in the beginning of their missionary works, proved to be resistant to things foreign. In order to respond to such a situation, these early missionaries requested more priests from Europe to join the missions in China to widely approach the Chinese authorities in order to offer scientific and intellectual scholarship to Chinese world. The followers of Ricci and Ruggieri deliberately adapt themselves to the Chinese world in every aspect possible. Lifestyles, intellectual and religious practices, and

even some cultural patterns were among the aspects they imitated, as these missionaries felt the need to push forward their missionary works by associating with more people and things Chinese. These missionaries also saw the possibilities to discover and rediscover the common place for intellectual harmony in ancient Chinese classics and wisdom. As Ricci himself devoted the rest of his life in China to preaching and spreading the religion, many of his followers did so too. The level of commitment was incredibly high. The lifelong commitment was a crucial factor to ensure the church authorities' continued support of the missionary work in China. At the same time, these missionaries also worked and served as the representative of the China Mission, who, when travelling back to Europe, also acted as an important force that was responsible for creating positive and favourable images of China in the European world, in order to rally more support for their works. In the meantime, with these missionaries' active and zealous participation, they befriended many high Chinese officials, promoting Western scientific knowledge in China. The most well-known case is Xu Guanqi, who was then a scholar-official, and was in the late Ming Dynasty the most influential figure who helped the Sino-European cultural exchange and transmission. Because of his high rank in the court, and because of his conversion into the Catholic church, Xu was one of the most powerful people at that time to defend and to help promote the missionary works in China. And, as a learned intellectual who held high position at court, Xu was rather passionate about introducing the European knowledge to China, as he himself was an author in the field of useful knowledge, such as agriculture, mathematics, and astronomy. Xu was disappointed with the decline in Chinese scientific development, and when being introduced to European practical science, he knew the good of it. He collaborated with Jesuit missionaries, Matteo Ricci and Sabatino de Ursis, and together they translated several Western scientific classics into Chinese, among which included *Euclid's Elements*. Xu's efforts to initiate the use of "practical studies" and the reforms for Ming Dynasty's high policy and intellectuals were not particularly popular among his peers and contemporaries, but his enthusiasm about, and his active performance in the cross-cultural encounter between China and Europe had certainly left behind a strong cultural legacy.²

² See William W. Appleton. "Merchant and Missionary". *A Cycle of Cathay: the Chinese Vogue in England during the Seventeenth and the Eighteenth Centuries*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1951, pp. 3-20. For more elaborate account of the Jesuit missionaries' works in China, see David. E. Mungello. *Curious Land: Jesuit*

Partly for the purpose of language learning and partly to familiarise those who were then being trained in Europe with the Confucian ideology, missionaries in China collectively produced many translations of Chinese classics as scholarly references for the sake of European readership. Ricci and Ruggieri attempted to translate the *Four Books* which were traditionally regarded as the Confucian canons. Several generations of Jesuits too worked together to introduce and to transmit the ideology and knowledge of Confucianism to Europe. The collective efforts led to the 1687 publication of *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* in Paris by Father Philippe Couplet and Father Prospero Intorcetta. The work was published in Latin, including the annotated translation of three of the *Four Books*, and a biography of Confucius. Although the Jesuits may have done this for practical religious purposes, this indirectly reshaped European philosophical ideas and practices. Jesuit missionaries, consequently, played an invincible part to bridge the great cultural divides between Europe and China. While these missionaries had to adapt themselves to the Chinese context to appeal to more religious followers, these missionaries had to adapt what they had learnt in China to the European context in order to gain more support from the Continent. Accordingly, to present to the Catholic Church the viability of mission in China, the Jesuits represented Confucianism as secular, moralistic ideas, and a series of doctrines that were used to stabilise the society, instead of a spiritual and religious system. In other words, by presenting Confucianism as non-religious and rationalistic, it would cater to European philosophers' tastes, especially in the Age of Enlightenment when European thinkers found themselves more attracted to the concurrent development in numerous aspects of science (the emergence of Scientific Revolution) that installed innovative perspectives of things and then furthered their explorations of studies on men, humanity, and reasoning. Despite the wide range of critical ideas, the period fundamentally and essentially challenged the existent beliefs and pursued as well as valued the empirical knowledge and reasoning through the process of contradiction and constant debates. In Britain, the British Enlightenment took a rather different route from its European peer and saw its origins in the examination of reasoning led by Isaac Newton who based the new scientific reforms on substantial

Accommodation and the Origin of Sinology. Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1989. And *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500-1800*. Maryland: Roman & Littlefield, 2005.

observations and logics instead of metaphysical ideas. This mode of constant inquiries were adopted by its contemporary intellectual minds, and soon proved to be an influential force that rose above the Church's teaching. Although the British Enlightenment was not directly or greatly inspired by the European Catholicism, ultimately the inquiries and questions challenged the Catholic Church, and urged the Church to reform according to the onrush of rationalism in this era. Deism or secularism were introduced and promoted by thinkers, and then they furthermore resulted in political, religious and social reforms in general. At its core, the Enlightenment promoted scientific thought, scepticism and intellectual interchange and opposed superstition, intolerance and the abuses of power by the Church and the state, which provided a fertile ground for the Confucian ideas to spread in the Continent and Britain alike. The Jesuits deliberately incorporated Confucian values about morality and politics into Catholicism to create positive images of Confucianism. Simultaneously, Confucius was greatly promoted as an ideal philosopher-ruler who advocated rejection of superstition and the good use of intellect and human reasoning which not only echoed with the ancient Greek political ideals but also with contemporary quests for social reforms. The general ethics in Confucian ideology were thus more readily accepted by intellectuals at this time.

Even despite the Jesuits' deliberate and almost successful attempt to accommodate Confucianism in the contemporary European contexts and intellectual minds, the nature of Enlightenment scepticism still inspired the opposite stream of thoughts about Confucianism, creating a great divide among the intellectuals which could be roughly categorised as sinophobes and sinophiles. Interestingly, sinophobic or sinophilic, the European thinkers at this time often developed their arguments on and critiques of Confucianism without questioning the sources and the Jesuits' accounts of China and its cultures. In other words, these Jesuit missionaries' interpretive accounts of Confucian ideas—instead of the authentic Confucian ideas in China—became the prototype of Confucianism in Europe. This does not mean that the Jesuits distorted the Confucian ideology but means that they did appropriate the Confucian ideology to fit in their propaganda, which inspired more intellectual debates on all sorts of matters, especially during the first half of the eighteenth century where various publications about China and its cultures were made available.

There were discussions on the polity of China as more European thinkers became sceptical about whether the government of China should be classified as sheer despotism or enlightened absolutism. There were also debates on the rites controversy that questioned the Jesuit missionaries' appropriation of idolatry and pantheism in Chinese folk religious practices, causing a dispute within Catholic Church to emerge. Some questioned the Jesuits' compromise and submission to the Chinese converts' ancestor worship as early Jesuits attempted it as a social practice within the Confucian ideological and hierarchical framework, not as a form of idolatry or superstition. The dispute went on, and had undergone a long struggle, which eventually shook the Jesuits' footings in China as well as in Europe. Although both in the late Ming Dynasty and early Qing Dynasty, several Jesuits were employed in the courts, and had amiable relationships with emperors and officials of high ranks, the controversy over Confucianism and the rituals of ancestral worships began to weaken the power of Jesuit missionaries' works in China, and the missionary works were terminated when Pope Clement XIV dissolved the Society of Jesus in 1773, putting a full stop to the century-long Sino-European intellectual exchange via Jesuit priests.

Apart from Jesuit priests' accounts of China and the Confucian ideology widely circulated in Europe, other forms of Sino-European cultural transmission were also taking place. The intellectual debates mainly stayed in the field of the learned, cultural exchanges of other sorts, on the other hand, were made possible among the mundane. In the Age of Enlightenment, while intellectuals dedicated themselves to numerous discussions on China, the rise of new market mechanisms grew stronger in Europe, and the material side of Chinese culture gained more vigorous presence among the general public. Chinoiserie entered the European world in around the second half of the seventeenth century. Because the sea routes of trades were built by European explorers and used by tradesmen, the imports of foreign goods and commodities were much facilitated, and among which chinoiserie played a major part. In the beginning, the rarity of the chinoiserie only found its popularity among people of higher social ranks. Before long, the artists found some similarities between the popular contemporary Rococo style and the decorative nature of chinoiserie. Challenging the grandeur, symmetry and strict regulations of its preceding Baroque style, the Rococo style sought

an ornate, whimsical and sometimes flamboyant approach in their art forms. The delicate, exquisite, fluid, and intricate qualities to the chinoiserie catered to the Rococo taste, and the Rococo artists incorporated more “Chinese taste” into their artistic presentations. The original foreignness quality of the chinoiserie consequently became more familiar to the European audiences. Apart from painting, decorative arts, interior design, architecture, and gardens, when combined with the Rococo style, were all under the influence of the Chinese taste.³ French artist François Boucher was also among one of the major proponents for Rococo art and to exemplify the Chinese influence in the Rococo art. Boucher himself worked on the Chinese-related topics, including “Le Jardin Chinois” (“The Chinese Garden”, 1742) and “Festin de l’empereur de Chine” (“Feast of the Emperor of China”, 1742), to name just a few. Originally, the chinoiserie had the novelty appeal, and it did not immediately challenge the conventional aesthetics. In other words, the Chinese taste was then viewed as a sideline, an alternative set of aesthetics to then classical ideals. However, with the Chinese taste more infused into the contemporary Rococo art, the foreignness of the chinoiserie began to sit more comfortably in the European context. In Britain, although the contemporary European Rococo art was not particularly welcome or quickly accepted by the Britons, the Chinese-influenced Rococo style crept into the English aesthetics and became well-liked. The English chinoiserie reached its high point in the Georgian era. In England, one of the most famous cases that was inspired by the Chinese taste was—and still is now—the pagoda in Kew Gardens, designed and built by the architect William Chambers in 1762. As an author who travelled to China, Chambers published *Designs of Chinese Buildings, Furniture, Dresses, Machines, and Utensils: to which is Annexed a Description of their Temples, Houses, Gardens, &c*⁴ in 1757. And in 1772, Chambers published another book that dealt with the Chinese garden: *A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening*.⁵ Less of serious and academic treatises on things Chinese, these two books by Chambers found their significant influences on the contemporary British popular taste and aesthetics. Chinese elements

³ See Dawn Jacobson. *Chinoiserie*. London: Phaidon Press, 1993. Also see David Porter. *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England*. Cambridge: CUP, 2010.

⁴ William Chambers. *Designs of Chinese Building, Furniture, Dresses, Machines, and Utensils: to which is Annexed a Description of Their Temples, Houses, Gardens, &c*. London: Printed for William Chambers, 1757.

⁵ William Chambers. *A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening*. London: Printed by W. Griffin 1772.

such as pavilions and pagodas were often seen in contemporary garden designs, installing new energy to the English aesthetics. Fanciful, intricate, and imaginative, and delicate are among some common descriptive words that were used to portray the chinoiserie, and before long, this peaking trend formed a peculiar cultural phenomenon: the Chinese taste.⁶

As aforementioned, the Chinese taste was at first regarded as an alternative aesthetic value system, which did not pose direct and obvious threat to the European classicist aesthetics which is primarily based on the Greek and Roman traditions. However, with the wide circulation of chinoiserie and the great acceptance of the “Chinese taste”, this aroused serious concerns on several aspects. First of all, when introduced into Europe, the chinoiserie was celebrated for its foreignness, exotic yet exquisite beauty, if sometimes excessively flamboyant. When incorporated with Rococo style, the circulation of “the Chinese taste” ran wild, and more people became rather concerned about how it may be domesticated and further defy the conventional aesthetical hierarchy. Second, as early imports of chinoiserie were rare in quantity, the commercial values of these were immense, which benefitted the tradesmen who imported the goods, and later, collectors too. These people gained enormous profits by manipulating the market prices through commercial trades, and before long they accumulated personal wealth significantly. The trades led to the change in the distribution of wealth, and helped the new rich to emerge. The new rich—mostly understood as “the middling sort” or “the middle class”—shook up the social hierarchical ranks. The middle class sought to identify themselves with the upper class in a politico-economic sense by reflecting and imitating the lifestyles of the upper class. Meanwhile, the aristocracy and the new rich competed with each other and among themselves through the purchase of chinoiserie. This peculiar phenomenon, to many intellectuals, had switched away from the sheer appreciation of the beauty in novelties to the competition and flaunt of fortune. The ability to afford chinoiserie became a strong indicator of new social ranks. To differentiate between the aesthetic preferences and the flaunt of wealth, the concept of “taste” started to form. In the early discussions of luxury, the value of things may be the central topic; but gradually, the capabilities to

⁶ For the formation of “the Chinese taste” and “the English taste”, please see David Porter. *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England*. Cambridge: CUP, 2010. Or Porter’s earlier treatise, *Ideographia: the Chinese Cipher in Early Modern Europe*. Stanford: Stanford University, 2004.

actually appreciate certain quality, texture, and craftsmanship of things became the core matters, suggesting another dimension to the luxury discussions, namely, “the taste”. In the last few decades of the eighteenth century, the discussions on luxuries became competition on the idea of “taste” instead of the market value of things. When first imported, eastern luxuries were mainly commodities of the finest quality and rare in quantity. However, with the demands growing fast, more eastern commodities imported to Europe were not necessarily of the best quality in the manufacturing countries; instead, commodities that were less costly were imported in a large quantity, known as semi-luxuries. These semi-luxuries soon became the mainstream on the market because of their great accessibility and affordability. These semi-luxuries offered an even greater variety in colour, pattern, and design with a wide range of qualities and prices, which created a new venue for individuals to express their diverse dispositions to purchase and to display. The individual dispositions of these novelties became a strong indicator of one’s aesthetics rather than wealth. With the development of strong individualities, the concept of “taste” was further fortified. The primary concerns of luxuries switched from commercial values to aesthetical values. How to incorporate and showcase novelties of different price ranges to complement one another became a more central issue, which also allowed the expanding middle class to be a part of the trend.

At its peak, the imported luxuries and semi-luxuries also contributed to the emergence of European imitators, as European manufacturers saw immense profits in this trend. Mainly in France and England, domestic manufacturers found their own ways to adapt to the remaking, reinterpreting and reproducing the oriental goods. In order to gain the greatest profit, mass production was essential. In the late seventeenth century, inspired by oriental goods, French artists creatively thought of ways to apply single designs to multiple materials and products, allowing production costs to be lowered. English artists soon went down the same route. Because of mass production, the European imitators were able to offer luxury look-alikes with lower prices, making the cheaper version of the luxuries more available and affordable to a wider population, even to the domestic consumers of lower social classes.⁷ This also entailed two

⁷ Maxine Berg alerts readers that this should not be confused with the idea of “Fordism” which is a twentieth-century consumption idea, focusing on the mass production in a very limited number of varieties, and deploying automated production lines. See Maxine Berg.

parts of consumption behaviours and mindsets: on the one hand, there was the sheer sensual pleasure in enjoying the novelties, and with the mass production of the semi-luxuries or cheap luxuries, the mass was able to enjoy them as well. On the other hand, the general public, although only with limited purchasing abilities, had the tendency to duplicate the lifestyles of the middling sorts and even the aristocracy through consumption and copying the taste of the socio-economic ranks above them. At one point, the chinoiserie was the target of mid-eighteenth century satire, as the price of the chinoiserie remained high, which, the intellectuals worried, would eventually deprive Britain of its domestic economic power because of the great quantities of the imports introduced to Britain, which might damage the chances of local manufacturers. The intellectuals' concerns were understandable, but obviously the manufacturers found a way to survive the predicament. By the later eighteenth century, British manufacturers established a network, within which they could work close by with one another. Matthew Boulton and Josiah Wedgwood were the centre of this network that helped produce both semi-luxuries and ornamental luxury in this era. This extensive network could be regarded as a positive European response to the eastern and Chinese commodities in terms of material culture, because during the process of imitation, these British manufacturers were inspired to invent products of their own features that can be distinguished from the imports. This actually accelerated the process of industrial reforms because the manufacturers were eager to seek innovative techniques and methods to reduce the costs of productions and to develop their own designs while mimicking the styles of the originals. And eventually, as the development of these European duplicates reached maturity, the oriental and Chinese goods ceased to intrigue European consumers.

The fad of chinoiserie gradually faded away in the nineteenth century. In France, the kindling of the French Revolution put an almost immediate stop to the trend as well as the extravagant lifestyle of the upper class. In England, the situation was more complicated. First of all, in Europe, the rediscovery of ancient cities such as Herculaneum and Pompeii revived general interests in classical Greek and Roman civilisations, reclaiming the passion for ancient European cultures. Chinoiserie, or the Chinese taste,

"New commodities, luxuries and their consumers in eighteenth-century England." Eds. Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford. *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe 1650-1850*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999, pp. 63-85.

as an alternative aesthetic value, was then renounced. Secondly, in Asia, after the war led by Robert Clive and the Nawab of Bengal, the East India Company gained political and military power in India, and more researches regarding Indian cultures were preferably conducted in order to better govern and comprehend the natives. British Orientalists, in particular, moved their scholarly interests from China to India and Hindu culture. Philologist Sir William Jones, for instance, was one of the most celebrated scholars who dedicated his studies to the Sanskrit language and Indo-European languages. Jones proposed that the Sanskrit language bore certain resemblance to Greek and Latin, and suggested the same linguistic root among the aforementioned languages. His researches founded the prototype for Indo-Euro studies. Thirdly, apart from the shift of scholarly attention, the commercial relations between England and China grew increasingly apart. On the British side, with more local English products replacing the expensive imports from China and the East, Britain found itself less interested in oriental luxuries. On the Chinese side, when the Manchu established Qing Dynasty, the government had been shying away from direct contacts with foreign countries despite the tributary countries. One of the reasons might be that Qing Dynasty is the second—and the last—dynasty established by non-Han people. As the tribe of Manchu was long regarded as barbarous by Han people in the central domain of Mainland, it had been the major concern for the first few Qing rulers. They endeavoured to follow the orthodoxy of the Chinese—or to be specific, Han—traditions while introducing their own. Some necessary measures to stabilise the country were introduced to avoid more political provocations from Han people and to proclaim their political legitimacy as a regime. As a result of such implicit worries, the Qing Dynasty was very conscious and concerned about the cultural, political, commercial exchanges with foreigners, especially those from non-tributary countries. The emphasis on the conventional Chinese orthodoxy helped reaffirm the Sino-centric perspectives regarding its foreign connections, and the deliberate closed-door policy restricted the interests in foreign affairs, putting economic and commercial strains on the relationships between China and other countries. One of the more well-known cases in Chinese diplomatic restraints at this era was the historic Macartney Embassy near the end of the eighteenth century, which marked the unsuccessful yet ambitious attempt of the British and the incapacity of the Chinese to see the increasing need for diplomatic and commercial exchanges with foreign

countries. This resulted in growing tension between England and China. Chinoiserie, which had been a symbol of China's exquisite and tinted beauty, was now reduced to fragile, breakable objects whose values were greatly reduced. To Britain, Chinese civilisation grew more stagnant, tiresome, and lifeless.

At the end of the eighteenth century, a significant event changed Europe as a whole: the French Revolution. This was a perfect example to demonstrate European's hunger for more renewal and revolution, bringing the long-disputed intellectual, cultural and philosophical ferments to a short pause. As the French Revolution was regarded as a radical social and political upheaval that had broad impacts throughout Europe, England was no exception. In literature, British Romanticists advocated and promoted the French Revolution as a chance for change in social hierarchy, with the promise of regenerated human beings, and with the ardent love for humanity and free spirit. Aesthetically, the Romanticists gradually steered away from the Rococo style and the accompanying Chinese style, and reclaimed the classicist's Greek and Roman values. Apart from this, with the rediscovery of Rosetta Stone and the increasing emphatic needs to comprehend Indian culture, these Romantic writers sought novelty and foreignness elsewhere in Indian and other oriental cultures rather than Chinese cultures. The idea of "China" became tiresome, and was gradually dying away and being replaced by the idea of "china" which served the decorative purpose in the common household. From the nineteenth century, while the industrial revolution promised Europe with its endless and tireless progress, it also promised Europe a new energy and a new sense of supremacy that was quite contradictory to its previous humble admiration and curious exploration of foreign cultures. Particularly after the British embassies to China, China was perceived as a country of despotic absolutism whose economic and social performances had remained stagnant for centuries. In the meanwhile, with the reinforcement of industrial and military powers, Britain—as well as some other European countries—became more confident in the overseas expeditions, and after some minor confrontations with China, Britain saw its opportunities to usher in military engagement. The confusion from the British towards China in the first two decades in the nineteenth century showed the growing struggles with and awareness of repositioning the oriental empire in the light of European sense of rationality, democracy and economical

efficiency. From the 1830s, Opium Wars and the subsequent military actions taking place in China demonstrated Britain's ambition to actively participate in its expansion of power in the South Sea and the rest of Asia. For China, the concessions made to Britain and other European countries further resulted in the decline of the Qing Dynasty. In the second half of the nineteenth century, due to the continuous instability and civil disorders as well as a series of external pressure from the Western powers, China was forced to open up, which led to the end of its regime.

The history of British and European attitudes towards China and Chinese culture is outlined as above. This research project would concentrate on the crucial period from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, with the attempt to trace and underline the representations of China through analysing some of the most celebrated works. The theoretical framework for this project is not to seek the authenticity of China in these representations, but to explore how they came into place and to celebrate the varieties in the opinions about China. Although historical contexts are always crucial to the understanding of the occurrences of these representations, it is nearly impossible to fully restore the historical background that can be used to provide a thorough comprehension of how these representations took place, because they were, more often than not, results of battling concepts and streams of thoughts. Nonetheless, these representations of China underwent enormous transitions that need careful examination, which can demonstrate how China was understood as an influential factor to Britain in the eighteenth century. England is the focal point in this research because it, more than any other European country, has shown more ambition to engage with China in the time frame chosen. Although English and French writers alike were passionately drawn to the topics of China in this period, and various aspects of China were keenly deliberated, fundamentally, English writers have shown more diversity because more significant contacts between China and Britain have taken place in this time frame. Indirect contacts such as *chinoiserie* and its influence on the luxury debates, the formation of the "Chinese taste" and the manufacture of *chinoiserie* look-alikes were all made possible in this period of time. Direct contacts such as the Macartney and Amherst embassies and the Opium Wars have given English writers more to write about than their French peers. It is hoped that this thesis is able to provide a clear picture about how China was

perceived by the projection of collective ideas, particularly in the intellectual horizons and material scopes, in England. In each chapter, the following questions will be carefully examined: what is the content of the representation? What does it represent in the historical and cultural context? What is the author's general attitude towards the representation? Does this attitude change? And if so, what contributes to the change? These questions will show the spectrum of differences in opinions and attitudes in terms of the representations of China in the British contexts of culture, politics, and economy from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, because the images of China went through the most tremendous dialectical debates and the most violent changes in these one hundred years.

The Mapping of Sinology in the Early Eighteenth Century

And therefore I must confess it seemed strange to me when I came home, and heard our people say such fine things of the power, riches, glory, magnificence, and trade of the Chinese, because I saw and knew that they were a contemptible herd or crowd of ignorant, sordid slaves, subjected to a government qualified only to rule such a people [...] As their strength and their grandeur, got their navigation, commerce, and husbandry, and imperfect and impotent, compared to the same things in Europe. Also, in their knowledge, their learning, their skill in the sciences; they have globes and spheres, and a smatch of the knowledge of the mathematics; but when you come to inquire into their knowledge, how short-sighted are the wisest of their students! They know nothing about the motion of the heavenly bodies; and so grossly, absurdly ignorant, that when the sun is eclipsed, they think it is a great dragon has assaulted and ran away with it; and they fall a clattering with all the drums and kettles in the country, to fright the monster away, just as we do to hive a swarm of bees.

Daniel Defoe, *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*⁸

Long before other British writers started their various considerations of China, Daniel Defoe was one of the few pioneers writing about this subject matter. In fact, in his long career as a professional writer, China was one of the topics that Defoe constantly went back to. In 1705, fourteen years before the lonesome Robinson Crusoe made his trip to the Far East, Defoe wrote an earlier version of science fiction about a man's voyage to the moon. The work, *The Consolidator, or, Memoirs of Sundry Transactions from the World in the Moon*, is Defoe's own construct of a world in the moon where civilisation reaches its highest level and is far more advanced than the world on earth. As the narrator undertakes the journey to the moon via China to help with political and social renewal there, China is a transfer station that connects not only the moon and the earth, but also the ancient and the modern world. The narrator cites the widely circulated myth about China that "all men know the Chinese are

⁸ Daniel Defoe. *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, &c. Dublin, 1719. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale. University of Warwick Library. 12 Aug. 2010. <<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&contentSet=ECCOArticles&type=multipage&tabID=T001&prodId=ECCO&docId=CB129684172&source=gale&userGroupName=warwick&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE>> , pp. 219-220.

ancient, wise, polite, and most ingenious people”. He believes that China is the source of all human inventions and wisdom. The narrator continues his remarks:

As the Chinese have many sorts of Learning which these Parts of the World never heard of, so all those useful Inventions which we admire our selves so much for, are vulgar and common with them, and were in use long before our Parts of the World were Inhabited. Thus Gun-powder, Printing, and the use of the Magnet and Compass, which we call Modern Inventions, are not only far from being Inventions, but fall so far short of the Perfection of Art thet have attained to, that it is hardly Credible.⁹

The narrator’s depiction of Chinese cultural supremacy may sound rather convincing, but beneath his compliment to China lies a satirical hint of the prevailing Chinese myths created by the European Jesuit missionaries in the seventeenth century. As Defoe modelled the work as a political allegory, scholars have long focused on the object that he set out to criticise. Narelle L. Shaw and Maximillian E. Novak both point out that this work tackles “the problems posed by the Spanish succession and the High Church’s move to tack an important land bill onto a bill designed to prevent the occasional conformity of dissenters”.¹⁰ Shaw has a point as she sees Defoe’s *Consolidator* as a response to contemporary disputes about China and Chinese civilisation. In this work, the narrator talks to a philosopher from the moon, who discloses the fact that the supremacy of Chinese culture and civilisation were actually orchestrated by a man from the moon and then by the efforts of a Chinese Emperor. In other words, all the civilisational advancement that China takes pride in are never of its own making, but are a result of the constant communication between China and the moon. Thus, the design that the narrator has to use China to renew the lunar world can also be regarded as a revisiting of widely circulated beliefs proposed by the Jesuit missionaries and European philosophers that European civilisation should and can be renewed by the Chinese one. In this light, it is easy to see the sceptical stance that Defoe

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 5.

¹⁰ Narelle L. Shaw. “Ancients and Moderns in Defoe’s *Consolidator*”. *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 28, No. 3, Restoration and Eighteenth Century. (Summer, 1988), pp. 391-400. Also see, Novak’s *Daniel Defoe: Master of Fictions*. Oxford: OUP, 2001. pp 237-261.

took towards popular myths about the achievements of Chinese civilisation.

Defoe's sceptical attitude reflected the Chinese vogue was then growing so fast that it started to worry some European literati, and these literati began to cast doubt on the more positive images. In *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Defoe again came back to the topic and explored further. Since the end of his first journey, Robinson Crusoe has returned to England and has a wonderful life with family; yet his longing for foreign adventures never ceases to haunt him. Now at 61, after the death of his beloved wife, the fictional character finds it even harder to "resist the strong inclination" that he "had to go abroad again".¹¹ Therefore, as his nephew presents to him this very idea of travelling to the East Indies and to China as private traders, it rekindles his passion for world navigations. The narrative starts from Crusoe's desire to return to "his island" and to witness "a future state", and is pushed forward by a series of events and geographical explorations. Before Crusoe's crew and ship hit the coast of China, they have travelled to Madagascar, and have stayed for a while in the Bay of Bengal, then Cambodia and Cochin-China (now Vietnam). Crusoe's goal in China is simple: he aims to purchase "China wares, calicoes, raw silk, tea, wrought silk" that he could carry home and sell in England. As soon as the crew arrives in China, Crusoe finds that the Chinese people are "ignorant", "sordid", and "miserable", and that China is a country "indefinitely populous but miserably cultivated"¹² and a heathen land mostly out of the reach of Christian civility. Even though Crusoe does not have the most pleasant experience travelling in China, one thing that he does not criticise about China is its vast range of material goods that could only be produced, manufactured and retailed there. As Crusoe is impressed by the well-paved roads of Peking ("very convenient for travellers", he comments) and the fine quality of wrought silk mixed with gold (of which he purchases a large quantity), he is particularly impressed by a "gentleman's house built with China ware" which "a family of thirty people lives in" shown to him by the Portuguese pilot of his crew. At first Crusoe is slightly underwhelmed by the "timber-house" look of the building, but as soon as he walks in the house, he is surprised. Then he gives a very detailed depiction of the house:

¹¹ Defoe. *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*. p.6

¹² *Ibid*, p.221.

The outside, which the sun shone hot upon, was glazed, and looked very well, perfectly white, and painted with blue figures, as the large China ware in England is painted, and hard, as if it had been burnt. As to the inside, all the walls, instead of wainscot, were lined with hardened and painted tiles, like the little square tiles we call gally tiles in England, all made of the finest China, and the figures exceeding fine indeed, with extraordinary varieties of colours, mixed with gold, many tiles making but one figure, but joined so artificially with mortar, being made of the same earth, that it was very hard to see where the tiles met. The floors of the rooms were of the same composition, and as hard as the earthen floors we have in use in several parts of England, especially Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, &c., as hard as stone, and smooth, but not burnt, and painted, except with the same tile; the ceilings, and in a word, all the plastering-work in the whole house, were of the same earth; and after all, the roof was covered with tiles of the same, but of a deep shining black.¹³

Crusoe's descriptions might seem fascinating, but are equally exaggerated. The magnificent Chinese house caters to current British taste for China and chinoiserie, and is not merely an imaginary construct. Followed by Crusoe's remarks that "as this is one of the Singularities of China, so they may be allowed to excel in it; but I am very sure they excel in their Accounts of it", it is not hard to observe Defoe's own critical attitudes towards this Chinese vogue. Defoe's satirical tone is important to our understanding of the reception of China at this time, as this is the era when the overseas expedition were taking place and the commerce and trade became the bloodline for the country's economy. As Eric R. Wolf points out, this was an era when "the sea lanes around Asia lay open to intruders able to marshal sufficient military and organisational resources to push aside the Turkish coastal fleet and to penetrate the waters of the Indian Ocean", which enabled the Portuguese, the Dutch and then the English to engage in the controls of sea-lanes and trades".¹⁴ Defoe's characterisation of Crusoe and his travels not only broadened the horizons of its contemporary readers but also reflected the age of maritime explorations. These passages to foreign lands introduced different aesthetics to the

¹³ *Ibid*, p.228.

¹⁴ Eric R. Wolf. *Europe and the People without History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.

domestic audience, particularly a rising audience in the metropolis. The exotic landscape, the intriguing encounters with different cultures, and the distinguished characteristics of various nations fostered the rise of travel literature. David Fausett points out in his *The Strange Surprising Sources of Robinson Crusoe*, “travel literature began from the later seventeenth century to focus on the otherness (rather than the inverted sameness) of the place visited, and on the truth-value of an account as well as the story it contained. It thus reflected the emergence of a wider empiricism, and of a modern social economy in general”.¹⁵ In this light, *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* demonstrates Defoe’s awareness of his readership and Crusoe’s travels to the Far East are a conscious authorial decision to appeal to an audience “hungry for narratives of travel to exotic places, for sensational and unusual adventures and breathtaking wonder and mystery”.¹⁶

The rise of travel literature is a mark of European overseas explorations. The extended mapping of “new” worlds and foreign lands naturally drew comparisons between Europe and the non-European worlds. Crusoe’s remarks on China show Defoe’s pride in British maritime activities, as they suggested the advanced technology and scientific developments. Christianity alike was spreading out fast and reaching to lands outside Europe. However, Defoe’s reserved attitude towards this overheated Chinese vogue is of interest here. Philosophical land or not, cultural achiever or not, China was unwilling to open up fully to trade with European countries, which had long posed a challenge to these eager traders and merchants and the economy involved. G. A. Starr comments in his article “Defoe and China” that “Defoe’s image of China is based on his selective and tendentious use of comments by Western observers, who had written to serve ulterior purposes of their own and were often biased”.¹⁷ Defoe’s treatment of China (as well as the national characteristics) underlines his political, economic and religious concerns. Based on the considerable discussions about the sources that Defoe draws upon, Starr points out that Defoe’s “writing about the country [China] is largely satirical, but the ultimate object of satire is often not China itself so much

¹⁵ David Fausett. *The Strange Surprising Sources of Robinson Crusoe*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994. p.199.

¹⁶ John Richetti. "Introduction". *Robinson Crusoe*. By Daniel Defoe. London: Penguin Classics, 2003. pp ix - xxiix

¹⁷ G.A. Starr. “Defoe and China”. *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 43, no. 4, Summer 2010. pp. 435-54.

as English and European folly” because Defoe “portrays England’s own infatuation with East Indian goods as jeopardising the manufactures and trade on which its continuing prosperity depends”. Defoe’s economic concerns permeate his writings, particularly as the East India Company further sought to expand trade with Asiatic countries after its establishment in 1600. In 1694, the East India Company was allowed by law to establish a private trading base in India; ever since then, the East India Company furthered their trades with Asia, and the mainstay imports at that time were cotton, silk, tea, and dye. However, because the goods that England produced and exported were of no need to China or other Asian countries, all the trade had to be carried out with silver or other precious metal. Defoe’s concerns were thus reasonable: he was worried that the enormous outflow of precious metal would weaken the economic power of England and would enrich the East India Company itself. As for China, one of Defoe’s criticisms of the country and its governance lies in his serious concerns about the unequal distribution of wealth from the government to its people. To Defoe, no utopia will be made possible if people of the country live in misery. As a result, he thought that the philosophical governance in China greatly praised by the Jesuit missionaries was overrated. The despotism viewed by the Jesuit missionaries as a stabilising force for the social order was questioned by Defoe as he thought of it as tyrannical and demoralising for the government while creating weakness and dependence in its people. From this perspective, it is not surprising to read that Chinese people were “ignorant” and “miserable” and China a poorly-cultivated country in Defoe’s account. To Crusoe, even the Great Wall designed to resist the invasion against the Tartars was belittled as a wall that could be battered down “in ten days” by “an army of our country people, with a good train of artillery; or our engineers, with two companies of miners”. The house made of chinaware is indeed “the greatest rarity of all the country” which could have attracted the Sinophiles’ attention, but this house of delicacy is nothing more than a fragile building, a metaphor for China in Defoe’s view.

From economic and religious points of view, Defoe was convinced that the Chinese vogue was simply produced by zealous philosophers and eager Jesuit missionaries after the “Great Discoveries” took place in the fifteenth century. The Portuguese and the Spanish took the lead in establishing direct contacts with Africa, the Americas, Asia and Oceania,

with the ambition to open up geographical exploration outside the Continent. And very soon, the pursuit of gold, silver, spices and other material commodities became the primary objectives for these European sea powers. As the network of sea trade grew more stable, the Catholic Church saw it as an opportunity to promote the Christian religion to other “heathen” lands. Thus, the Society of Jesus was founded in 1534 to spread Christianity to the worlds outside Europe, and Asian countries were their primary goals. As China was the biggest empire in Asia at that time, it became a destination that could serve more than commercial purposes. The first attempt to reach China was made in 1552 by Spanish missionary Francis Xavier, but he failed to reach mainland China and ended up dying on an island near Canton and Macau. It was not until three decades later that the Jesuits restarted their missionary work in China. This time several figures, including Italian missionary Matteo Ricci, introduced not only Christianity but also Western science, mathematics, astronomy to the imperial court of the Ming Dynasty. This mission not only opened up the intercultural dialogue between China and Europe, but also facilitated the Jesuit missionary work in China. Among many tasks the Jesuits achieved, early intellectual exchanges between Christianity and Confucianism were of particular significance. At its peak development, many Jesuit missionaries held prestigious posts in the court, and befriended many Chinese officials and scholars; as a result, these officials and scholars were converted and joined the religion. As Matteo Ricci believed in the importance of spreading the gospels by using indigenous languages and cultural concepts, the accommodation between Christianity and Confucianism proved to be a successful adaptation of Christianity to the political and cultural environment in China.¹⁸

The Jesuit missionary work in China proved to be more effective than expected. The joint forces of Christianity and Confucianism made the missionary work much easier, and had an impact on Chinese culture more generally. In turn, the impact was even greater in Europe. With a little help from their Chinese friends, these Jesuit missionaries studied Chinese philosophies (particularly the Confucian and Taoist ideologies) and systematically introduced them to Europe. By late seventeenth century, a comprehensive edition of the Confucian canons was first translated and

¹⁸ For more about the early missionary history in China, please refer to William W. Appleton’s book, *A Cycle of Cathay: The Chinese Vogue during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1951

printed in Latin, entitled *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*. The book was published in Paris, 1687, and was regarded as the first systematic introduction to a European audience about Confucius's philosophy, which influenced many European thinkers and their works, for example, the German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz. In Jesuit depictions of China, China was a land ruled by philosophers, a land of agricultural abundance and highly active commerce, which made China an even more popular focus for European interests. The European countries took advantage of this opportunity and pursued more trade and commercial activities with China, mainly confined to the Canton area. From this point, tea, chinoiserie, and Chinese gardening entered the European cultural landscape, and dominated the European perspectives of China.

China, undoubtedly, gained its cultural ascendancy in Europe from the second half of the seventeenth century.¹⁹ In its adoption of this vogue, Britain was in line with its European peers, particularly regarding the exploration of China. As early as 1669, an English architect and scholar, John Webb, published his researches on China. The book, under the title of *The Antiquity of China or an Historical Essay: Endeavouring a Probability that the Language of the Empire of China is the Primitive Language, Spoken Through the Whole World, Before the Confusion of Babel*²⁰, was the first treatise on the Chinese language in Europe, and made a remarkable contribution to the early intellectual development of Euro-Sino relations. Webb's study was mainly based on Jesuit missionaries' travelogues, and it argued that China had preserved the most primitive form of language since the biblical deluge. This viewpoint was generally accepted in Europe, and especially in England. Rachel Ramsey in her essay "China and the Ideal Order in John Webb's 'An Historical Essay...'" observes that the Jesuits' accounts and travellers' narratives about China were particularly appealing to English readers "living in the aftermath of the civil wars and the turmoil of the early years of the Restoration because they [these accounts] offered glimpses of a seemingly ideal state ruled by a stable monarchy and blessed with seemingly infinite

¹⁹ The discussions of the frequent contacts between Europe and China at that time can be found in Appleton's *A Cycle of Cathay*. Also see David Porter's study in *Ideographia: the Chinese Cipher in Early Modern Europe*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

²⁰ John Webb. *The Antiquity of China or an Historical Essay: Endeavouring a Probability that the Language of the Empire of China is the Primitive Language, Spoken Through the Whole World, Before the Confusion of Babel*. London: Printed for Obadiah Blagrave, 1678.

resources and unimaginable wealth”.²¹ In terms of trade, however, the first British attempt to open up trade with China can be dated back to 1637 when the armed ships led by Captain John Wendell and backed by the East India Company and secretly by King Charles arrived at Macao; however, this act was opposed by the Portuguese and the Ming authorities. The British managed to stay in Macao until December that year as they were forced to take leave. And it was not until 1711 that the British East India Company returned and joined its European peers and established its trading station in Canton. Once the sea route of trade was made accessible, imports of Chinese textiles, tea, and chinaware alike weaved an intoxicating world for the Britons. England by now was, like the rest of the Europe, under the charm of China.

The Chinese vogue emerged and dominated the whole of Europe for the next two centuries, and a new aesthetics was introduced to the European audience. As David Porter notes in his article “A Peculiar but Uninteresting Nation: China and the Discourse of Commerce in Eighteenth-Century England”, “[i]n the first half of the eighteenth century, an increasing tide of Chinese imports contributed to a popular vogue that filled drawing rooms with the fanciful porcelain productions of chinoiserie and gardens from Postdam to Kew with temples and pagodas ‘after the Chinese taste’”.²² The pursuit of novelty and miniaturisation was the primary value found in this “China craze”. Nevertheless, even though it became a pan-European phenomenon, with more Chinese materials being introduced to Europe, there was a counter force to this fascination. One major reason for scepticism was the lack of direct and first-hand cultural reference and historical significance in this Chinese vogue. This resulted in the rivalry between those who were over-enthusiastic and those who were unimpressed and unconvinced. Sociologist Ho-Fung Hung sees this rivalry between the Sinophobes and the Sinophiles in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries entangled “in the conflict between the absolute monarch and the feudal aristocracy and was a continuation of the seventeenth-century conflict between the Jesuits and the Jansenists”.²³ In

²¹ Rachel Ramsey “China and the Ideal order in John Webb’s ‘An Historical Essay...’”. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (Jul., 2001), pp. 483-503

²² David Porter. “A Peculiar but Uninteresting Nation: China and the Discourse of Commerce in Eighteenth-Century England”. *Eighteenth-Century Studies*. Vol. 33, Number 2, Winter 2000. pp. 181-199

²³ Ho-Fung Hung. “Orientalist Knowledge and Social Theories: China and the European Conception of East-West Differences from 1600 to 1900.” *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 21, No. 3, pp. 254-280

this ambitious essay, Hung sets out the complicated history between the Jesuits and the Jansenists, both of them major religious factions within the Catholic community. In France, the monopoly of the Jesuits' access to China ignited the jealousy and soon "the controversy of rite" was brought to the table. The Jesuits depicted the rite of ancestry-worship in China as an act to show respect from the younger generation to the older. The Jansenists, on the other hand, argued with conviction that this was a practice of idolatrous worship. In this debate, the Jesuits in their own defence, as Hung suggests, "further idealised Confucianism and presented it as a rational religion".²⁴

In the debate of rites controversy, Du Halde was often quoted and was regarded as a prominent figure among Jesuit scholars. His encyclopaedic work, *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique et physique de l'Empire de la Chine*²⁵, was undoubtedly one of the most significant works in this debate. Starting with the overview of the Chinese history and brief introductions to different dynasties, and ending with observations on the neighbouring Tartary countries to China, Du Halde's work was based on the materials collected from other Jesuit missionaries' works, and introduced China in a very systematic way. Through his editing, Du Halde makes good use of his materials and divides the main aspects of China (that is, history, religion, philosophy, language, materials, and geography) into four volumes. Among the four volumes of Du Halde's work, the second volume is probably the most interesting one, because it deals with some of the most highly-acclaimed qualities of China. From the philosophy of government to agriculture, from porcelain and silk productions to the studies of the language, the second volume covers the areas that could attract a wider general audience's attention. Take the section on the Chinese language, for example. Du Halde first compares the original Chinese language to Egyptian Hieroglyphic characters, and states that the Chinese managed to find a way to "alter['] their old manner of Writing; they composed Characters of a more simple Nature, and invented others to express those things that are Objects of our Senses".²⁶ And if ancient Greek was a language of wisdom, the evolved variant of

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.258.

²⁵ Jean Baptiste Du Halde. *Descriptions or The General History of China*. Trans. Richard Brookes. 4 vols. London: John Watts, 1736. [Trans. from *Description géographique, historique, chronologique et physique de l'Empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie Chinoise*. 4 vols. Paris: P.G. Lemercier, 1735.]

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 394.

Chinese-Mandarin certainly deserves more careful study, for each character of the Chinese language carries a unique concept and meaning. Du Halde believed that the Chinese language could inspire the alphabetical system of European languages, because “the style of the Chinese in their Compositions is mysterious, concise, allegorical, and sometimes obscure to those who do not perfectly understand the characters [...] their Expressions are lively, full of spirit, and intermix’d with bold Comparisons and noble Metaphors”.²⁷

Regarding the heated debates on the Chinese religion, Du Halde not only carefully examines the differences between the philosophical and the religious ideas, but also divides the general Chinese religion into three categories of beliefs: the Learned, the Disciples of Lao Kien, and the Idolaters. As Du Halde states:

The first of these Sects only make Profession of being regular students, in order to advance themselves to the Degrees and Dignities of the Empire on account of Merit, Wit, and Learning, proper for the Conduct of Life, and Government of the Empire.

The Second has degenerated into a Profession of Magick and Enchantment; for the Disciples of this Sect boast of the Secrets of making Gold, and of rendering Persons immortal.

The third is nothing but a Heap of Fables and Superstitions brought from the Indies into China, and maintained by the Bonzes, who deceive the People under the Appearances of false Piety; they have introduced the Belief of the Transmigration of Souls, and promise more or less Happiness in proportion to the Liberality that is shewn to themselves.²⁸

Here, Du Halde induces the three different types of religious beliefs prevailing in China, and the religious system in China could be rather complicated. In order to illustrate further his points and to convince more European readers, he cites the popular common belief at that time that the original empire of China was founded by “Sons of Noah” who were “scattered abroad in the Eastern Part of Asia” and “some of the

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 395.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, pp. 14-15.

Descendants of this Patriarch penetrated into China about two hundred years after the Deluge”.²⁹ Du Halde points out that:

It is a common Opinion, and almost universally received [...] that instructed by Tradition, concerning the Grandeur and Power of the supreme Being, they taught their children, and thro' them their numerous Posterity, to fear and honour the Sovereign Lord of the Universe, and to live according to the Principles of the Law of Nature written in their Hearts.³⁰

Du Halde identifies the Chinese people as the descendants of Noah, which suggests that the origin of the Chinese people is not much different from the Europeans. He also skilfully avoids addressing the idea of God in this matter and attempts to assimilate the idea of *Tien* (Heaven) or *Chang ti* (God) with the Christian idea of God. Even so, Du Halde is aware of the distinctions between the two and is still somewhat proud of European civility under the umbrella of Christianity. On the one hand, he believes that “this [Christianity] would be to require too much of these People, who could not be instructed, as we were, with the Precepts of the Gospel”.³¹ But on the other hand, Du Halde tries to bring the Chinese ideas of *Tien* and *Chang ti* closer to his European audience, and to distance them from pantheism in China. Du Halde argues:

It is true that though the Canonical Books often exhort Men to fear *Tien* [Heaven], and tho' they place the Souls of virtuous Men near *Chang ti* [God], yet it does not appear that they have spoken clearly of the Punishments in the Life to come; in like manner tho' they affirm that the Supreme Being created all things, yet they have not treated of it so distinctly as to judge whether they mean a true Creation, a Production of all things out of Nothing; but though they are silent with relation to this, they have not affirmed it to be a thing impossible, nor, like certain Greek Philosophers, after that the Matter of the Universe is eternal.

Tho' we likewise do not find that they have treated explicitly concerning the State of the Soul, but have only confused Notions relating to this Matter, yet it cannot be doubted but they believe

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 15.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 15.

³¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 28.

that Souls exist when the Body ceases to act; and they also believe the certainty of Apparitions.³²

Here, Du Halde sees the Chinese as potential converts, not as a superstitious race. Du Halde manages to maintain an almost neutral stance when addressing different aspects of the Chinese cultures by deploying analytical and critical examinations. Although his comments many sometimes come across as too serious, Du Halde is able to find a way to persuade his European audience to empathise across cultural differences. By associating his research materials with European cultures, he wishes both to enhance his European readers and to earn more support for Jesuit missionary work. Du Halde's strategy proved very effective, as his work not only consolidated the studies of China and the Chinese vogue, but also popularised the Jesuit missionaries' researches and findings to a wider audience of Europe.

One year after the French original was published, Du Halde's *Description* was translated into English by Richard Brooks, and was published by the publisher John Watts. In 1738, *The Description* was again translated jointly by Green (first-name unknown) and William Guthrie under the printer Edward Cave. The introduction of Du Halde's work into England soon made an impact on English intellectuals. As T.C. Fan observes, "Du Halde's work on China and its translation were often quoted without acknowledgement" and "[Oliver] Goldsmith was one of the many who plagiarised"³³. With the prevailing influence of Du Halde's *Description*, more English writers started to respond to this particular work. Among those who were influenced by Du Halde's work, Dr. Samuel Johnson was one of the most important figures as he was often regarded as the advocate of the Chinese philosophy and vogue in England. Samuel Johnson in many places in his works mentions Du Halde's *Description*. In his biographical work *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, John Boswell narrates a literary anecdote about Johnson's comment on the Cave edition of the Du Halde translation:

Green and Guthrie, an Irishman and a Scotchman, undertook a translation of Du Halde's history of China. Green said of Guthrie,

³² *Ibid*, Vol. 3, p. 28.

³³ T.C. Fan. "Percy and Du Halde". *The Review of English Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 84, pp.326-329, 1945.

that he knew no English, and Guthrie of Green, that he knew no French, and these two undertook to translate Du Halde's history of China. In this translation there was found, -- "the twenty-sixth day of the new moon." Now, as the whole age of the moon is but twenty-eight days, the moon, instead of being new, was nearly as old it could be. The blunder arose from their mistaking the word *neuvième* ninth, for *nouvelle*, or *neuve*, new.³⁴

From this casual remark we find Johnson has looked closely at the Cave edition. Although he does not have high opinion of this particular edition, it was nevertheless widely read in England at that time. In fact, Johnson himself wrote an essay on *The Description* in 1738. The essay, titled "Letter on Du Halde's *History of China*", is a critical response to Du Halde's work. Even though Johnson did not think too highly of the translation, he did speak highly of Du Halde's work. In the opening paragraph, Johnson thanks Du Halde for "having undertaken, at so great an expense, to convey to English readers the most copious and accurate account, yet published, of that remote and celebrated [Chinese] people".³⁵ Johnson continues by teasing apart the difference between two levels of contemporary fascination with China:

Any custom or law, unheard and unthought of before, strikes us with that surprise which is the effect of novelty; but a practice conformable to our own pleases us, because it flatters our self-love, by showing us that our opinions are approved by the general concurrence of mankind. Of these two pleasures, the first is more violent, the other more lasting; the first seems to partake more of instinct than reason, and is not easily to be explained, or defined; the latter has its foundation in good sense and reflection, and evidently depends on the same principles with most human passions.³⁶

The prevailing love for things Chinese, as Johnson points out, is due to the novelty of these items, and the effect of novelty is pleasing to its audience. But he also alerts that this "violent" passion might not be lasting, because once this novelty is lost, the passion fades away. Therefore, he believes

³⁴ James Boswell. *The Life of Samuel Johnson*. London: Hutchinson, 1791.

³⁵ Samuel Johnson. "Letter on Du Halde's History of China". *The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL. D.* Ed. Arthur Murphy. 6 Vols. Oxford: W. Pickering, 1825. Vol. 1, pp. 1-4.

³⁶ *Ibid*, Vol.1, pp. 1-2.

that only through the true understanding of China and its culture can this short-lived passion last longer than a mere passing trend. And Johnson also argues that true understanding of China takes “good sense and reflection” and “reason”.³⁷ However, Johnson might be the one who is over-enthusiastic. In this short letter, the first half is full of Johnson’s admiration of Du Halde, and probably more importantly, his zeal for the idealised China portrayed in Du Halde’s work. He believes that any man would feel amazed by the Chinese sages’ instructions on morality and virtue, while he is also convinced that China is “a country where nobility and knowledge are the same, where men advance in rank as they advance in learning, and promotion is the effect of virtuous industry; where no man thinks ignorance a mark of greatness, or laziness the privilege of high birth”.³⁸ While complimenting China on the diligence, Johnson exemplifies to his contemporary readers that class segregation, corrupt government and bitter poverty are the emerging issues in the society at that time. This concern is well expressed in Johnson’s poem “London: A Poem” where he shows his worries as he comments that “This mournful Truth is ev’ry where confest, / SLOW RISES WORTH, BY POVERTY DEPREST”.³⁹ Johnson uses China to stage his social critique for the contemporary England.

One major difference between Du Halde and Johnson’s attitudes towards China is now evident. Both of them hold high opinions of China, yet it is not hard to see that Du Halde is slightly more conservative (as well as careful) than Johnson. Du Halde’s treatment of China is of a sociological and analytical nature, while Johnson’s over-idealisation leaves several blind spots in his remarks. Clearly, Du Halde’s scholarship approaches China from a—if not comprehensive—well-rounded perspective. Most of

³⁷ One major concern in Johnson’s writings is his restless pursuit of the universality in human values and the study of knowledge. For example, in his poem “The Vanity of Human Wishes”, Johnson opens up the poem with his enthusiastic quest to “survey mankind from China to Peru” with “extensive view”. In this long poem, Johnson blames the human desires and the nature of human nearsightedness for limiting human vision. Here, Johnson again advocates only through the true knowledge and the study of China can one exceed the quick-passing trend of Chinese vogue.

³⁸ Samuel Johnson. “Letter on Du Halde’s History of China”. As Ian Donaldson argues, it is the discontent about the world revolving around Johnson that urges him to pursue general knowledge. “The Vanity of Human Wishes” demonstrates Johnson’s determination to “seize the central principles of the human learning” and to “shake knowledge from the natural world”. However, Donaldson also notes that the one major flaw in Johnson’s thinking is his tendency to overemphasise the importance of observation and reasoning while Johnson himself often neglects the world he is in. See Ian Donaldson, “Samuel Johnson and the Art of Observation”. *ELH*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (Winter, 1986), pp. 779-799.

³⁹ Johnson. “London: a Poem”. *The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL. D.* Vol. 1: p. 141.

the time, Du Halde manages to act as an impartial editor, even though he is able to associate the often misread messages about Chinese culture with European ones and make these messages accurate and understandable to the target audience. One of the best examples in this work is his comparison of the Chinese language to European ones, which allows the readers to grasp some ideas about the pronunciation of the Chinese language. Johnson's letter on Du Halde's work is preoccupied with his unreserved admiration for China and the Chinese culture, despite his own advocacy of the use of reasoning when approaching Chinese culture. In the second half of his "letter", Johnson tells of a tale inspired by Du Halde's descriptions of the Chinese monarchy and the philosophical nature of their hierarchy. This tale highlights Johnson's belief that the Chinese monarchy is able to stand the tests of "reason, law, and morality". For instance, he believes that "[h]onest ministers [...] have been seen more than once in that monarchy, and have adventured to admonish the emperors of any deviation from the laws of their country, or any error in their conduct, that has endangered either their own safety, or the happiness of their people".⁴⁰ Here, Johnson uses China to argue for intellectual meritocracy in England. Besides, the philosophical quality of the Chinese monarchy reminds him of an event in England where a marquis and a prince settled their argument not by hierarchical force but by pure reasoning. Even the signature of "Eubulus", the name of an ancient Greek philosopher, at the end of this letter proves his strong fascination about the use of philosophy and reason, and China proves to be a good example for Europe.

Du Halde's *Description* also facilitated the rapid circulation of the most famous Chinese dramatic work, *Tchao Chi Cou Ell, Or, the Little Orphan of the Family of Tchao: A Chinese Tragedy*. This theatrical work was first introduced by a French Jesuit missionary Joseph-Henri-Marie de Prémare in 1731, and was later collected in Du Halde's *Description*. This work soon drew attention from the French thinker, Voltaire, who adapted the story as a play, and published it under the title of *L'Orphelin de la Chine*⁴¹ in 1755. The popularity of this play soon grabbed the British publishers' attention. The very next year, in 1756, a translation of this play was done by an anonymous translator, and was published by the publisher William

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Voltaire. *L'Orphelin de la Chine, Tragédie*. Paris: Michel Lambert, 1755. *The Orphan of China*. Dublin, Printed for William Smith, 1756.

Smith in Dublin. In the preface, Voltaire identifies Du Halde as the main source of his writing, and states that “[t]he idea of this Tragedy was first conceived some time ago on reading *The Orphan of Tchao*, a Chinese Tragedy, translated by Father Brémare⁴², which may be found in the Collection published by Father Du Halde”.⁴³ Citing Du Halde as the main source for his writings, Voltaire makes his own alterations and expresses his opinions. The most noticeable alteration is the time and the place that the story takes place. Du Halde starts with an introduction to Chinese theatrical works. He then points out that the rules of Western dramas (“Time, Place and Action”, Du Halde reminds us) do not apply to Chinese ones, partly because the Chinese “have always lived as it were in a World by themselves”, and partly because “[t]he chief Design in their Plays has been to please their Countrymen, to move their Passions, and to inspire them with the Love of Virtue, and a Detestation of Vice”⁴⁴, which, in Du Halde’s opinion, is successful and sufficient for the Chinese people. To remain true to the original, Du Halde follows most of the versions circulated in China and bases his version on the event itself, although he removes the specific time and space that the story happens. However, in Voltaire’s adaptation, he further changes the characters’ names from Mandarin to Mongolian Tartar ones, which is a blunder that not only Voltaire but also Du Halde makes. Du Halde points out in the “Advertisement” page that this Chinese tragedy is translated by Father de Premare from the complete collection of *Yuen Gin Pe Tchong* (*One Hundred of Plays and Playwrights of Yuen Dynasty*), which, he believes, “is a Collection of a hundred of the best Plays that were composed under the Dynasty of Yuen, and contains forty volumes distributed into four *Tao*”.⁴⁵ Voltaire furthers this error by changing the setting and the names from Mandarin to Tartary and he claims that “[i]t is a new proof that the victorious Tartars did not change the manners of the nation vanished; they protected all the Arts established in China; they adopted all its Laws”.⁴⁶ (Voltaire, *The Orphan of China*, viii). Yet both Du Halde and Voltaire misunderstand the nature of this collection. It is indeed true that drama

⁴² In Du Halde’s “Advertisement” page of this work, he notes that this work was firstly introduced by Father Joseph Henri-Marie de Prémare. Here, Voltaire made a mistake by misspelling the name of the original translator.

⁴³ “L’idée de cette Tragédie me vint, il y a quelque tems, à la lecture de l’Orphelin de Tcho, Tragédie Chinoise traduite par le Brémare, qu’on trouve dans le recueil que le pere du Halde a donné au public.”

⁴⁴ Du Halde. *Descriptions or the General History of China*. Vol. 3, p. 195.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Voltaire. *L’Orphelin de la Chine, Tragédie*. p. viii.

was the literary forté in that dynasty, but the story itself takes place way back in Confucius' time. This historical event has been well-known over the centuries, and has appeared in various literary works, most notably in *The Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji)*. Du Halde might have translated this work from a playwright named Ji Jungxiang of Yuen Dynasty, but Du Halde neglects the fact that Ji based his play on a historical event rather than his own original creation. Voltaire's alteration is even more evident in this sense. With this understanding, the change of the title from *The Orphan of Tchao* to *The Orphan of China* would make more sense, historical particularity is cancelled in Voltaire's case, and it also further generalises the circumstances of the original narrative.

Apart from altering the names and background of the play, Voltaire adds "the morals of Confucius in five acts" as brief summary to his edition of the stage play. Although absent from the original text, this brief description can be viewed as the most direct engagement with the work itself from Voltaire. This, in a way, sums up Voltaire's own attitudes towards China and Chinese cultures. It is true that the moral conveyed in this play is well attuned to Confucian ideology, but it also demonstrates that Voltaire is ignorant of the actual historical circumstances. Followed by his comments that the Tartars helped to preserve Chinese art and morality, Voltaire even believes that "[t]his is a striking instance of the natural superiority of reason and genius over blind and barbarous force".⁴⁷ This literary genre of "dramatic poetry", as Du Halde and Voltaire call it, is an art form that preserves the best bits of Chinese culture. Voltaire comments:

The Chinese [...] cultivated above three thousand years ago that art, found out a little time after by the Grecians, of drawing living portraits of the actions of men, and of establishing those schools of morality, where virtue is inculcated by action and dialogue. Dramatick Poetry was for a long time in repute, only in the vast country of China, separated from, and unknown to the rest of the world. [...] One may infer from hence, that the Chinese, the Greeks, and the Romans are the only ancient people, who had a true notion of society. Nothing, in effect, makes men more sociable, more

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. ix.

softens their manners, brings their reason to greater perfection than assembling them to taste together the pure pleasures of the soul.⁴⁸

Here, Voltaire compares Chinese cultural heritage to the ancient Greek and Roman, and he pays compliments to the high level of achievement in this genre that it has attained. Voltaire indicates that this particular genre, with action and dialogue, could arouse the audience's interest, and would help pass down the morality, virtue and reason from generation to generation. And moreover, similar to the catharsis effect in Greek tragedy, Chinese dramatic poetry carries the function of bringing the audience to a higher level of perfection, and through this unity of reasoning the social network is much more strengthened. Interestingly, Voltaire's optimism subsides in the following section as he starts to ponder Chinese cultural stagnation:

Yet the Chinese, who in the fourteenth century, and so long before, composed better Dramatick Poems than all the Europeans, have always remained in the mere infancy of the art, while by time and diligence our Nation has produced about a dozen pieces, which, if they are not perfect, are yet definitely beyond any thing that all the rest of the world has produced in that kind. The Chinese, like the other Asiaticks, have stopt at the first elements of Poetry, Eloquence, Physicks, Astronomy, Painting, known by them so long before us. They begun all things so much sooner than all other people, never afterwards to make any progress in them.⁴⁹

Even though Voltaire points out the inactivity of Chinese culture, it would be fair to say that he regrets, rather than criticises, the stagnation of Chinese civilisation. Modern critic William Appleton points out that Voltaire's approach to China was both "admiring and patronising", even though the Oriental play "needed a final polishing from the eighteenth century man of enlightenment and taste".⁵⁰ In Voltaire's eyes, what China has begun long time ago in civilisation does not surpass the modern achievement in Europe, but this ancient empire can still lend some light to

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

⁵⁰ Appleton. *A Cycle of Cathay*. p. 85.

Europe, particularly in relation to political structures and religious institutions, two themes that Voltaire was very interested in.⁵¹

Although being critical at times, Voltaire was rather consistent in his admiration for China. In his other works such as *An Essay on Universal History, the Manners, and Spirit of the Nations*⁵² or *The Philosophical Dictionary*⁵³ Voltaire does not hesitate to show his true passion for the distant oriental empire of China. In *The Philosophical Dictionary* alone, Voltaire puts two entries about China, one being “China” and the other “Chinese Catechism”. In the first entry, rather than talking about China itself, Voltaire seems more keen on responding to his contemporary’s debate over China and the Chinese vogue. Voltaire firstly points out that “[w]e go to fetch earth from China, as if we had none; stuffs, as if we were without stuffs; a small herb to infuse into water, as if our climate did not afford any simples. In return, which is a very commendable zeal, we are for converting the Chinese; but we should not offer to dispute their antiquity, and tell them that they are idolaters”.⁵⁴ By succinctly summing up the Chinese vogue and disputes about Chinese antiquity, Voltaire mentions a German philosopher and mathematician of his time, Christian Wolff from the University of Halle, to defend his passion for China:

The celebrated Wolff, mathematical professor in the university of Halle, once made a judicious oration⁵⁵ on the Chinese philosophers; he praised this antient race of men, though different from us in the beard, eyes, nose, ears, and reasoning; he commended Chinese as adoring one Supreme God, and cherishing virtue, thus doing justice to the emperors of China, to the Koloas, to the tribunals, to the literati.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Voltaire’s enthusiasm for introducing to the contemporary European audience mainly comes from his strong beliefs in the humanistic ethical system in China. Voltaire, like most of his humanists in his time, thinks that China is able to provide an appropriate model for natural religion and political situation. The “philosopher-king” mode hugely promoted by these intellectuals is recommended to reform the religious and political turmoil in that period. See Walter W. Davis. “China, the Confucian Ideal and the European age of Enlightenment”. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Oct. - Dec., 1983), pp. 523-548

⁵² Voltaire. *Essai sur les mœurs et l’esprit des nations*. Trans. Thomas Nugent. *An Essay on Universal History, The Manners, and Spirit of Nations*. London: J. Nourse, 1759.

⁵³ Voltaire. *Dictionnaire philosophique*. p. 77.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 77.

⁵⁵ Christian Wolff. “On the Practical Philosophy of the Chinese”. 1721. *Oratio de Sinarum philosophia practica*. 1726. Third Edition, with notes of Hal Langius. 1736, 4to.

⁵⁶ Voltaire. *Dictionnaire philosophique*. p. 78.

Wolff is an interesting case in eighteenth-century philosophy. Wolff's ideal (along with his teacher Leibnitz's) was to base theology on the evidence of mathematical certitude, which aroused the Pietists' rage in Halle at that time. "On the Practical Philosophy of the Chinese", Wolff's famous lecture of 1721, could be viewed as a defence against the Pietists' belief as he celebrates the moral precept of Confucius as evidence of the power of human reason to attain moral truth. Wolff represents a general belief in the Chinese philosophy shared by many intellectuals in the Enlightenment, which leads to a battle lasting for ten years between Wolff himself and his Pietist opponents. To support and defend Wolff's stance, Voltaire calls these opponents "utter strangers to China", whose envy, hatred, and syllogism ("all the men of any note or consideration at Pekin were atheists; now Wolff had commended the Pekin philosophers; Wolff therefore was an atheist", as Voltaire puts it) sacrifice a great man of reason to "the rancour of a blockhead".

Voltaire's outcry against injustice towards Christian Wolff was followed by his defence of the longevity of the Chinese history and empire. Voltaire starts by mocking anyone who attempted to alter the true history of China, and soon he proposes that the Europeans should "leave the Chinese and the Indians in the quiet enjoyment of their fine climate and their antiquity; especially let us forbear calling the emperor of China and the soubab of Decan idolaters: neither are we to be infatuated with Chinese merit".⁵⁷ (*PD*, 80). Although Voltaire tries to remain neutral and reasonable, he can barely contain himself as he advances his observations on China:

The constitution of their empire is, indeed, the best in the whole world, the only one which is intirely modelled from paternal power (the mandarins, however, chastise their children very severely) the only one where the governor of a province is punished, if, at the expiration of his office, the people do not shew their approbation of his conduct by loud acclamations; the only one which has instituted prizes for virtue, whilst every where else the laws only punish vice; the only one whose laws have recommended themselves to its conquerors, whilst we are still swayed by the customs of our conquerors, the Burgundians, the Franks, and the Goths. But it must be owned, that the commonalty who are

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 80.

bonze-ridden, are no less knavish than ours; that foreigners are extremely imposed on, as amongst us; that in science the Chinese are two hundred years behind us; that, like us, they have a thousand notions, that they give credit to talismans and judicial astrology, which was also our case for a long time.⁵⁸

Up to now, we find Voltaire in his constant dilemma when he deals with such subject matter. On the one hand, he praises China for its antiquity, its highly philosophical political structure, its morality, and its virtue; on the other hand, he is reserved with his comments on the Chinese scientific developments. He, like most of his contemporary intellectuals, is very much aware of the backwardness and stagnation of the Chinese culture, particularly in terms of science and technology. Like Voltaire, many intellectuals rally in support of political and social reforms by borrowing the examples from the Far East, especially China. In the French original, Voltaire arranges “Chinese Catechism” to follow up, in order to strengthen his argument that the Chinese philosophy could inspire the Europeans in many ways. This philosophical dialogue between Cu-Su (“a disciple of Confucius”) and Prince Kou (“son to the King of Lou”) might after all remind the European readers so much of the Socratic Dialogues in which a philosopher takes the lead in various discussions. In Voltaire’s case, the “Chinese Catechism” consists of six dialogues, in which it appears that the two characters are disputing about the *Chinese* religion and theology where they are actually debating and challenging the theology of Christianity.

In the “Chinese Catechism” entry, Voltaire uses the format of Christian catechism to expound his interpretation of many aspects in Western civilisation with which he is truly concerned. Even though the characters designed here in the dialogues are Chinese, yet the ideas they discuss are not particularly central to Chinese philosophy; rather, they appear to be more similar to Western philosophical thesis. In terms of characterisation, Cu-su, the disciple of Confucius, is the philosopher who is guiding the king-to-be with very thoughtful philosophical as well as political ideas, which, correspond to the early Jesuit portrait of China as a land ruled by a philosopher-prince. The characterisation is thus familiar to its contemporary readers. The six dialogues can be roughly divided into two

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 86.

parts: the first three dialogues, like a traditional Christian catechism, answer fundamental questions such as the Deity of God and the existence of mankind; while the latter three respond to more secular inquiries, and mainly the concerns of politics. In the first of the three dialogues, the disciple of Confucius, Cu-su, instructs Prince Kou to ponder the basic concepts of God—or, at least, the Supreme Being. In the first dialogue, the two start to debate the essence of Heaven, Supreme Being, and God. The dialogues also demonstrate Voltaire's epistemological stance, particularly in the first dialogue when Prince Kou praises Cu-su for his "not pretending what you really do not know", and submits himself to Cu-su's philosophical guidance. In the next dialogue, they debate over the deity of God and how mankind should receive such a supreme being. The key issue is still Voltaire's scepticism towards the Christian religion: if God is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent and omni-benevolent, the wicked and the evil should never exist. To respond, Cu-su urges the prince to use his reasoning, as he remarks that "God has endued you with reason, neither you nor they [the wicked ones] are to make a wrong use of it".⁵⁹ Human intellect and reasoning, rather than God's power, could have suppressed the evil better. This urge to use reason is explored in the third dialogue where the two further challenge the existence of soul and God's intention behind it. Cu-su starts by challenging the prince as he introduces the system that God shapes for mankind, and Prince Kou argues that if God indeed knows everything and is everywhere, the soul is not needed by human beings, because God's power alone can animate everything in this universe. To further reiterate his point of view, Voltaire speaks through the prince's mouth, "I would embrace this system with all my heart, only its being proved to me; but it is not in my power to believe without evidence". As Prince Kou comments on the laws of Sinous (the "Ten Commandments" in the Bible), he believes that some of them are universally shared by different nations. In this light, no specific religious forms are necessary while reason, as a result, can and should be used as the fundamental concept for human virtues and knowledge. And the ideas of "after-life" or "another life" are thus pointless to the prince, as they are only a mechanism to reward people's good acts and good will in this life, a natural deism.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 50.

The latter three dialogues introduce more political ideas while entertaining philosophical concerns. As we mentioned in the previous paragraph, it was a shared belief in the Enlightenment era that China was a country where philosophical ideas could rule over political ones. The fourth dialogue demonstrates this idea well when Cu-su cites an instance of King Daon of Chaldea to guide the prince to think beyond his own stance and to look after all different needs, so that he will be able to settle disputes when he becomes a king. Again, not surprisingly, the case of King Daon calls for true reasoning to solve the problem. This instance particularly alludes to the aforementioned conflict between Wolff and Pietists in a way that it takes true reasoning for a ruler of the land to settle down the disputes without any personal preference. In other words, a ruler should be capable of taking an absolutely detached stance in order to lead his own country. This concept extends to the next two dialogues. In the fifth dialogue, Voltaire further uses this conversation to defend China and Chinese culture, especially on the points where China was most open to criticism, which includes the king having more than one wife and many eunuchs and concubines. In response, Prince Kou states that “I don't approve of kings with their three hundred wives and seven hundred concubines, and thousands of eunuchs to wait on them. This humour of having eunuchs, especially, appears to me a most execrable insult and outrage to human nature”⁶⁰. Kou's response earns the respect from Cu-su, and Cu-su pushes the envelope by asking the prince about his definition of love, and Kou answers that it is indiscriminate love and brotherhood of mankind. The humanity demonstrated in this dialogue not only provides its contemporary audience with another way to read Chinese cultures, but also defends the stance of the Sinophiles. Cu-su in the dialogue even mocks the stance of his opponents:

I have been informed of some so very conceited and impertinent as to say that we know nothing of true virtue; that our good actions are only specious sins; that we stand in need of their Talapoints to instruct us in right principles. Poor creatures! A few years ago there was no such thing as reading or writing among them, and now they are for teaching their master.⁶¹

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

Cu-su's words demonstrate to those who stand against the Chinese philosophy or civilisation that China, even though stagnant in some ways, is full of ancient ideas of wisdom that can shed light on its European counterparts, not vice versa. Cu-su exposes the lack of depth in European civilisation. In the next dialogue, the conversation between the two characters reaches a new high as they expand on the concept of virtues, inclusive of hospitality and humility. Cu-su proposes to the prince:

Humility I take to be mental modesty; for as to external modesty, it is no more than civility. Humility cannot conflict in denying to one's self that superiority which we may have acquired above another [...] Humility is not debasement, but a corrective to self-love, as modesty is the temperament to pride.⁶²

One interesting thing in the last two dialogues is that Cu-su and the Prince Kou seem to swap their roles; or, to be more specific, the Prince has become wiser in his judgement and reasoning with the development of the catechism; this, eventually, inspires his mentor, Cu-su, to take a back seat in guiding the people. This process of true learning is to examine one's self, and this design underscores the Enlightenment idea that China would elect a philosopher-king to reign over the land. In the perfect world of Voltaire's mind, rationalism can take over and shine the light of knowledge onto the people. The six dialogues go beyond the narrow views and the fierce debates on Chinese philosophy or Christian religion. No matter how heated these debates were, Prince Kou assures to Cu-su that his kingdom should be led in such a way that virtues and reason are the only standards for the country. Close to the end of this dialogue (as well as the whole entry of "Chinese Catechism"), Cu-su yet again praises Prince Kou's wisdom when Kou concludes that "[t]he Deity speaks to the heart of all men of all nations, and they should, from one end of the universe to the other, be linked together in the bonds of charity."⁶³ Only in this way, in Voltaire's mind, can the differences of philosophy, culture, religion and politics be fully introduced, used and respected.

Voltaire was persistent in his passion for China throughout his writing career. In another well-known work, *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations*, Voltaire spends more time on China and Chinese culture. The

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 59.

⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 56.

English translation, executed by Thomas Nugent, appeared in 1759 under the title of *An Essay of Universal History, the Manners, and Spirit of Nations*.⁶⁴ Voltaire sets out to introduce to European audience the history not so well-known to them. As Voltaire comments, these people “ought to be acquainted with the great exploits of sovereigns, who have improved the manners and contributed to the happiness of their people”, not only because the East is “the nursery of all arts” but also because it is a time “when our European chaos assumes a new form after the decline of Roman Empire”.⁶⁵ Voltaire even urges his readers to “survey this globe together” and “see in what state it then was, and consider it in the same order as it seems to have been civilised”. Voltaire begins his exploration of the globe with an overview of China, “who had a connected history in a language already fixed, before we [Europeans] knew how to write”. This last sentence in the introduction to the book is particularly interesting as it is interrelated to Cu-su’s comments on how some Westerners perceive China and its culture. To follow the introduction, Voltaire employs two chapters to introduce various aspects of China. As the titles suggest, in the first chapter he focuses on the force, antiquity and the laws of China, whereas in the second chapter he explores the subject of religion. That being said, Voltaire’s text covers slightly more than he intends. The two short chapters together articulate a concise history of China that sums up what the eighteenth-century intellectuals know about the country.⁶⁶

Chapter one starts with the fundamental information about China. He introduces China as a country that “has subsisted in splendour above 4000 years, without having undergone any material alteration in its laws, manners, language, or even in the mode and fashion of dress”.⁶⁷ This vast empire of China, in Voltaire’s view, is sustained in a state of philosophical and moral perfection, which allows its strength to remain unshaken by outer forces. Voltaire suggests that by spreading the moral virtues, China is able to unite “several petty states” of different sovereigns, and to these

⁶⁴ Voltaire. *Essai sur les mœurs et l’esprit des nations*. p. 1.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 2.

⁶⁶ Voltaire’s impact on the contemporary Continent was immense, and when he was in exile in England, his influence extended to the other side of the channel. Many contemporary English intellectuals were largely influenced by Voltaire’s works in a more general sense. For example, Edward Gibbon, the author of *The History of the Decline and Fall of Roman Empire* (1776-1789), has many times cited Voltaire’s arguments in his works. Voltaire’s views on China also influenced many writers such as Oliver Goldsmith, whose works and connections with Voltaire will be carefully examined in the next chapter.

⁶⁷ Voltaire. *Essai sur les mœurs et l’esprit des nations*. p.10.

moral standards even the Tartary tribes are willing to succumb to. This also helps to maintain the stability of the country, which results in the growth in population and military force, which also stems from its antiquity. Voltaire gives an example of the Great Wall, stating that it is designed and built “to defend China against the Tartars”, but it does not hinder the Tartars from invasion. Instead, the Tartar conquerors become a part of the conquered country, which is rarely seen in any history in the world. As for economics, Voltaire comments on the circulation of coins and paper currency, both as forms of arbitrary value. The lack of national banks in China fails to expand the credit of the nation. As for agriculture, Voltaire believes that the pleasant climate has made the land productive, where there are many different sorts of fruits and crops, some of which are familiar to Europeans while some of which are entirely foreign. Silk, paper, porcelain and glass are also mentioned, and Voltaire is convinced that the manufactures of these products follow the ancient techniques, which serves as the proof of China’s antiquity, and at the same time how advanced the Chinese civilisation once was. Voltaire also goes over some significant cultural products of China, such as printing, gun powders, astronomy, and the compass, and he reckons that even though Chinese people invented these items earlier than Europeans, the Europeans are not limited to the traditional methods like Chinese people do and are able to adopt new methods as well as innovative application, which, Voltaire comments, is “greatly superior to theirs”. In many ways, Voltaire states that the Europeans “have made [our] discoveries very late; but we have been quick in bringing things to perfection.”⁶⁸ The lack of technological innovation, along with the limited desire for any further improvements in skills and methods have made the Chinese people “incapable of going any further”. However, it is also interesting to see how Voltaire sometimes attempts to justify the lack of advancement in Chinese culture:

If any one was to inquire how it comes to pass, that this nation should during an uninterrupted succession of ages have cultivated the arts and sciences, and yet make so small a progress in them, perhaps two reasons may be assigned: one is the great respect they have for whatever has been transmitted to them by their ancestors, and which makes them look upon every thing as perfect that bears

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 19.

the stamp of antiquity; the other is the nature of their language, the first principle of all human knowledge.⁶⁹ (*UH*, 20)

Voltaire attributes the lack of innovation to Chinese people's respect of their ancestry, and the difficulty of this particular writing system. Voltaire easily blames the cultural stagnation on the great difficulty of the Chinese language, as he regards it as an inconvenient way to transmit the knowledge, which hinders common knowledge from being widely shared. Unsurprisingly, however, Voltaire praises the only two true improvements that the Chinese people have are in morality and the laws. Voltaire observes that "[t]he respect which children bear to their parents, is the foundation of the Chinese government." With such respect, China is a state where "paternal authority is so strongly supported among them", and to a large extent the vast empire is transformed into a single giant family. Even with such a strong hierarchy, China's "modesty and decorum...softens and tempers their manners", and therefore "this gentleness and civility reaches even to the lowest class of people". The righteousness of the Chinese laws "reward virtue" while other countries' laws "inflict punishments on criminal actions", which prompts Voltaire to state that "this morality, and this submission to the laws, joined to the worship of a supreme Being, constitutes the religion of China, as professed by the emperor and the men of literature".⁷⁰

In Voltaire's view, virtue, morality, and the laws should be considered as the features of the nation, a consistent view that he is never tired of elaborating. In the second chapter, he describes the religion of China, with which he dedicates to the long-existing, yet unsolved debates in Europe. He begins his argument with the discussion on Confucianism. In Voltaire's argument, Confucianism should be taken as a religion, and Confucius' fine character is described as a "Deity". Confucius' "purest ideas that human nature unassisted by revelation can form of the supreme Being", Voltaire remarks, are the reasons why missionaries "believed that the Chinese acknowledged the true God" as they travelled to China. In Confucianism's defence, Voltaire directly addresses the disputes about Chinese religion in Europe:

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 20.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 22.

The reproach of atheism, which we, in this part of the world, are so apt to bestow upon every body, that is not of the same way of thinking as ourselves, has been lavished on the Chinese. Nothing but inconsiderateness, for which we are remarkable in all our disputes, could have made us presume to treat a government as atheistical, most of whose edicts speak of a supreme being, father of nations, recompensing, and punishing with justice, who has established betwixt himself and man, a correspondence of prayers and benefits, of transgressions and chastisements.⁷¹

In this section, Voltaire further explains the topic by providing the edicts from the emperors as a proof, which shows the false perception towards Confucianism. Unlike Du Halde, Voltaire points out, “it is true their religion does not admit of eternal rewards and punishments” and “it has been thought that the Chinese literati have not a distinct idea of an immaterial God”, but to him, “it is wrong to infer from thence that they are atheist”.⁷² To illustrate his ideas even better, Voltaire draws the examples of other ancient civilisations, such as Egyptians and Greeks, and indicates that it is not uncommon among these old cultures to be very religious and adore gods under human form. Therefore, Voltaire believes, the Chinese are slandered for being atheist merely because the metaphysics of China are very different from those of Europe. The other accusation circulated against the Chinese religion is that of the idolatry in China, which, in Voltaire’s view, contradicts the accusation of atheism. Voltaire once again steps onto the front lines and argues that

The great mistake in regard to the Chinese rites, proceeds from our judging of their customs by ours: for we carry our prejudices and litigious disposition to the further extremity of the earth. A genuflexion, which with them is only common civility, appears to us an act of adoration; and a table we mistake for an altar. Thus it is we judge of everything. We shall see hereafter, how our divisions and disputes drove the missionaries out of China.⁷³

Here, it seems that Voltaire wants to make the Chinese virtuous Deists. The Jesuits missionaries, being the first Western religious agents in China,

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

have long caused many disputes, among which is the regular criticism of the Jesuits' allowance for the Chinese people's worship of their ancestry. In defence, Voltaire associates Chinese deism with philosophical ideas, claiming the belief in the existence of Supreme Being—rather than other spirits, in Confucian ideology, a belief that is not remotely different from Christian religion. The “rites” dispute, in Voltaire's eyes, is merely a European misunderstanding and misreading to the Chinese civility and culture.

Besides his particular angle on the rite dispute, Voltaire also has his say about other forms of religion such as Buddhism or Taoism. He blames Loakium (or Lao-Kiun, now mostly spelt as Laozi) for its belief in “wicked spirits, enchantments, and witchcrafts”, and Buddhism for its superstition. Voltaire even makes a bold observation on these two religions, as he states that “these sects are tolerated in China for the use of the vulgar, as a coarse of food proper for their stomachs; while the magistrates and the learned, who are in every respect separated from the common people, feed on a purer substance.” In this light, Voltaire also dodges the general rebukes about multi-religious beliefs in China. The intellectuals are guided by reasoning, while common people are left in the pit of false beliefs. Voltaire furthers his point by saying:

A great many of the learned are indeed fallen into the error of materialism, but this has not altered their moral doctrine: They say that virtue is so necessary to mankind, and so amiable in itself, that they have no occasion for the knowledge for a God to follow it. Besides we ought not to look upon the Chinese materialists as atheists, since the primitive fathers of the church believed God and angels to be corporeal.

Here, it appears that Voltaire emphasises the great divide between the learned and the under-educated when it comes to the topic of religion in China. Voltaire holds the view that the learned intellectuals would never be superstitious as they are philosophical-minded and well-reasoning; as a result of which, it is inappropriate to over-generalise about the religious situation in China. Although Voltaire is keen on the missionary work in China, he becomes rather reserved when it comes to the fact that the Christian religion was introduced to China in as early as the eighth century

as Nestorianism, to which China was no stranger.⁷⁴ Voltaire compares this idea to the historical facts and finally comes to the conclusion that the attack on Chinese atheism is not only “one of the pious frauds” but also one of the “foolish lies”. From here, we find it evident that Voltaire is subtle in his attempt to reevaluate the myths about China.

Modern historian Jonathan Spence, a specialist in the interactions between China and the West, points out Voltaire’s cultural significance in the high tide of China fever. He argues that “the Jesuits were falling under political suspicion in Europe, coming under attack from both the lay intelligentsia and the Jansenists and also losing any influence they had once had in China”, which makes the circumstances complex. Still, the charm of China remained influential for quite a while. Spence attributes this cultural phenomenon to two major factors:

In part this influence was because China was becoming isolationist, restricting trade and travel to a minimum for all foreigners; the Jesuit histories kept their spell because they were firsthand accounts. But in part this influence was also because several French thinkers of the Enlightenment, beginning with Pierre Bayle and continuing through Voltaire, had seized on the data buried in the Jesuit book—especially the reality of an ethically moral Chinese society that was also patently non-Christian—to criticise the role that the Catholic church was playing in the European society of the time.⁷⁵

By any standards, the origin of the Chinese vogue in Europe was not at all about material culture; quite on the contrary, the religious, political, and philosophical enquires were the major factors. The ongoing disputes about China and its culture did not weaken its impact on Europe; instead, these debates increased people’s interest in China. The moral and virtuous

⁷⁴ Nestorianism was probably first introduced to China in sixth or seventh century, but was mostly best-known as “Jing religion”. It was once rather popular at Chang-An (now Xi-An), the capital of Tang Dynasty. Although it was mostly popular among non-Chinese people, its influence peaked when several emperors in late Tang Dynasty shared the belief in this particular religion. Nestorianism has its influence in China for centuries and finally declined in Ming Dynasty. See Morton H. Fried, “Reflections on Christianity in China”. *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Frontiers of Christian Evangelism (Feb., 1987), pp. 94-106

⁷⁵ Jonathan Spence. “Western Perceptions of China from the Late Sixteenth Century to the Present”, Paul S. Ropp, ed., *Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization*. California: University of California Press, 1990. pp 1-14.

forces that China represented shone a light on the European world, as many intellectuals believed that it possessed the power to renew and reform the politically and religiously decadent world. They saw this glimpse of hope, and without further firsthand materials they were limited to the Jesuits' words and experiences. In a way, the very idea of borrowing from the Chinese standards to assist Europe was quite impractical. And the more these people advocated the use of Chinese ideas, the more they provoked distrust among considerable others. Under such circumstances, cultural figures like Voltaire might have influence on the general public or on other contemporary thinkers, yet there was also a growing counterforce to their efforts. Therefore, it is not surprising when Spence observes that "[t]his emphasis on the practical and moral force of the Chinese, their potential for raising the quotient of goodness in the world, was still a matter for serious debate in the late eighteenth century."⁷⁶

The other contemporary intellectual in Voltaire's time who was deeply engaged with China was Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu. Probably drawing from the similar sources, the two took entirely different routes to approaching China. Montesquieu's most celebrated work, *De l'esprit des lois*⁷⁷, published in 1748, is an ambitious treatise that attempts a synthesis of anthropology, ethics, politics, and most importantly, laws. Montesquieu himself spent nearly twenty years on researching and completing this voluminous work. The English translation was completed by Thomas Nugent, and was published under the title *The Spirit of the Laws* in England in 1751. Just like Voltaire, Montesquieu was no stranger to numerous Jesuits accounts and travel narratives, but he managed to rise above these overheated pages and to develop a strong position against the laudatory testimonies, which oftentimes made his arguments convincing and original. Although in many places Montesquieu is contradictory in his arguments and is limited by materials available, the book attempts to restore an image of China that was less ideal but more realistic, practical, and accurate.

Arnold H. Rowbotham in his essay "China in the *Espirit des Lois*: Montesquieu and Mgr Foucquet"⁷⁸ points out that although both Voltaire

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Montesquieu. *De l'esprit des lois*. Paris: Barrillot & Fils, 1748. *The Spirit of the Laws*. Trans. Thomas Nugent. Dublin: G. and A. Ewing, 1751.

⁷⁸ Arnold H. Rowbotham. "China in the *Espirit des Lois*: Montesquieu and Mgr Foucquet". *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 2, No.4, 1950. pp 354-359.

and Montesquieu drew heavily upon the masterpiece by Du Halde, Montesquieu's critical stance was greatly influenced by an exiled Jesuit missionary, Jean-François Foucquet. Rowbotham's study shows that Montesquieu had met Foucquet during his visit to Rome in 1729, the time when he first planned a book on the various institutions of government. Foucquet had been in service in China from 1699 to 1721, during which time he informed himself about Chinese philosophy and culture, and he returned with a strong conviction to spread the greatness of Chinese civilisation in Europe. However, Foucquet's stance contradicted the majority of his fellow missionaries in many ways. For example, he believed that the history of Chinese religion demonstrated "a history of spiritual decadence from a pure monotheism to a frank atheism", while others believed in the fact that "there was no essential antagonism between the religions of the scholars and Christian doctrine".⁷⁹ Another distinction that separated Foucquet and others was the definition of the chronology of China. As Foucquet did not believe in anything preceding the fifth century B.C. in China, other missionaries dated it back to two thousand years B.C. Foucquet's constant contradiction of the majority finally made him too controversial a figure to remain in the Society as he "gave encouragement to those anti-Jesuits whose opposition was threatening the success of the China mission"; as a result of which, he was expelled around 1723. Foucquet's "vivacity and persistence" had always been a valuable asset to the Society, but since his exile from the Society, his vivacity "seem[ed] to have changed to acrimony".⁸⁰ And when Montesquieu met this retired missionary at Rome in 1729, he gained from Foucquet a great deal of original observations he made in China and was very impressed. Despite of the lack of direct evidence that showed Montesquieu had exchanged any ideas with Foucquet during his writing of the book, it is possible that Montesquieu was inspired by the rendezvous with Foucquet. This makes sense of Montesquieu's inconsistency towards China in *The Spirit of the Laws*. Rowbotham observes:

Montesquieu started with a preconceived theory of despotism, coming from his intellectual environment and the literature on the Near East. Then came his talks with Foucquet, which confirmed many of his ideas regarding Oriental despotism but, at the same time, impressed him with the richness and significance of Chinese

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

thought and institutions. These conversations probably placed him in a neutral position, although he still adhered to his arbitrary classification.⁸¹

In *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu categorises the governments into three kinds: republican, monarchical, and despotic ones. The sovereign power of the first kind is by laws, the second one by fixed and established laws with one man's governance, and the third one by one man's wills and caprices. Montesquieu spends quite some length on the despotic form of regime, as he regards it as a dangerous political system. To Montesquieu, the danger of the despotism lies in the fact that there is no counterforce to balance the reigning power, which will in the long run devastate the state's substance and ruin its economy. Many Eastern regimes and empires of absolutism are used to demonstrate the incapability of these states to remain stable for its own people. However, Sharon Krause notes that "the association between despotism and the Orient precedes Montesquieu" and originates with Aristotle. As a result, "Montesquieu's treatment of despotism drew upon these conventional associations and increased their force in the public mind" as he "systematized it and established the definition of despotism that came to predominate in the eighteenth century"⁸². Among Montesquieu's "arbitrary classification" of despotic Eastern countries, China is probably the most self-contradictory one, mainly because Foucquet's verbal account counteracts the positive opinions of Du Halde and Voltaire. In this work, China is often described as a despotic country of civility and often cited as contrast to the European political systems, which, as Sharon Krause points out, is Montesquieu's ultimate purpose for "his indirect critique of despotism nearer to home".⁸³

Readers of Montesquieu's *The Spirit of Laws* will find that Montesquieu's treatment of China is pretty much inconsistent. Throughout the book, China is used to contrast and highlight the European values, and to show how highly European civilisation had developed. But partly due to the inconsistency in his arguments, and partly due to the lack of convincing evidence, Montesquieu's depictions of China fall short of a stronger framework and are fragmented. The very first treatment of China in the

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Sharon Krause. "Despotism in *The Spirit of Laws*". *Montesquieu's Science of Politics*. Eds. David W. Carrithers, Patrick Coleman, Michael A Mosher, and Paul A Rahe. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2001. pp 231-271.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

book appears when Montesquieu talks about censorship. He argues that a censor is very much necessary to a republican country, because a republic is founded on the principle of good virtue, and a censor will be able to stop the threat of any morally destructive power. While in monarchies, no censor is needed, as these countries are founded on the value of “honour”, the very idea of which is subject to change. Montesquieu then proposes that “[t]he example of China seems to derogate from this rule, but we shall see in the course of this work, the particular reasons of that institution”⁸⁴. In this very first treatment of China, Montesquieu has already called on readers’ attention to the particularity of China that makes it “derogate” from the rules that he proposes. Soon after this, Montesquieu quickly moves on to the discussion of the different forms of laws employed in different political institutions, and the punishments involved. Of course, China is represented as a despotic country where severe laws and punishments are inflicted on the people. Montesquieu, while praising the honour and virtue of both monarchies and republican governments, despises the terror and the loss of life imposed on people in despotic countries. And Montesquieu cites Chinese authors’ remarks that:

It is a perpetual remark of the Chinese authors, that the more the punishments of criminals were increased in their empire, the nearer they were to a revolution. This is because punishments were augmented in proportion as the public morals were corrupted [...] In countries inhabited by savages who lead a very hard life, and in despotic governments, where there is only one person on whom fortune has lavished her favours, while the miserable subjects lie exposed to her insults, people are equally cruel.⁸⁵

Montesquieu believes that it is due to the low level of the Chinese people’s morality that the government needs to introduce laws and punishments of more severity, which in turn would decrease people’s sense of honour and virtue, like a vicious circle. To support his own argument, he gives an example of the Chinese punishment that “[i]n China, fathers are punished for the crime of their children [...] a custom derived from the notion of despotic power.” He continues:

⁸⁴ Montesquieu. *De l’esprit des lois*. p. 101

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 101.

In vain would it be to say, that in China the father is punished for not having exerted that paternal authority which nature has established, and the laws themselves have improved. This supposes that there is no honour among the Chinese. Amongst us, parents whose children are condemned to punishments and children whose parents have undergone the like fate, are as severely punished by shame, as they would be in China by the loss of their lives.⁸⁶

In this extreme example, Montesquieu indicates that China is a shameless country where paternal authority is over-asserted and abused. The paternal authority forms a hierarchy that oppresses people in respect to laws and punishments. This very idea is directly contrary to what Voltaire proposes as he believes in the paternal hierarchy is a key factor that helps to govern the vast empire and to stabilise society. Montesquieu also contradicts the images that the Jesuit missionaries had painted. The over-extensive power of the despotic country will be, after all, a decisive factor that ultimately destroys the political institutions.

To challenge China's image of immeasurable wealth, Montesquieu prescribes that the fundamental problem is overpopulation in China where the agriculture is the lifeline for its economy. Therefore, in an agriculture-based country such as China, luxury is very "dangerous", and "their sumptuary laws should be very severe." The reasons behind this judgement come from the climate being too pleasant which renders the land too productive and women too fertile. Montesquieu's asserts

In China the women are so prolific, and the human species multiplies so fast, that the lands, tho' ever so much cultivated, are scarce sufficient to support the inhabitants. Here therefore luxury is pernicious, and the spirit of industry and oeconomy is as requisite as in any republic. They are obliged to pursue the necessary arts, and to shun those of luxury and pleasure.⁸⁷

And this, according to Montesquieu, is "the spirit of the excellent decrees of the Chinese emperors".⁸⁸ Now, the inconsistency is shown as he at the same time asserts that the climate of China being so beneficial for humans to multiply, and comments that in China the land itself cannot support

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 114.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 124.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 122.

human subsistence. Under such circumstances, the ban on the wider circulation of luxury is no longer a despotic act but a well-thought act of wisdom from the emperors. He then associates the indulgence in luxury with moral decadence, and uses the history of China to support his argument. Judging from the historical facts, Montesquieu comes to the conclusion that the first few emperors of each dynasty are always wise, living a simple life whereas their successors always end up abusing the luxurious enjoyment, which leads to revolution and the doom of one dynasty. What makes this argument more interesting is that in previous sections, Montesquieu has just reached the conclusion that “[r]epublics end with luxury; monarchies with poverty”.⁸⁹ If Montesquieu were consistent, China should have been, in his point of view, a political system that mixed both monarchy and republicanism. The hesitation shows that Montesquieu is dubious about the authenticity of the images of China. Montesquieu thus justifies his own contradictory stance that “[i]t may be owing to particular, and perhaps very singular circumstances, that the Chinese government is not so corrupt as one might naturally expect. The climate and some other physical causes might have had so strong an influence on the moral cause in that country, as to operate in some measure, wonders.”⁹⁰ At the same time, Montesquieu sees that the want of subsistence produces many social problems, and he continues to remark:

As China grows every day more populous notwithstanding the exposing of children, the inhabitants are incessantly employed in tilling the lands for their necessary subsistence. This requires a very extraordinary attention in the government. It is their perpetual concern that every body should be capable of working without any apprehension of being deprived of the fruits of his labour. Consequently this is not so much a civil as a domestic government.

Such has been the origin of those so much boasted regulations. They wanted to make the laws reign with despotic power; but whatever is joined with the latter loses all its forces. In vain did this arbitrary sway, labouring under its own misfortunes, desire to

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

put letters on its power; it armed itself with its chain, and became still more terrible.⁹¹

These two paragraphs probably can best demonstrate Montesquieu's hesitation. On the one hand, he follows the Jesuits' beliefs that China is a country of natural productivity and fertility with a pleasant climate. On the other hand, he is under the influence of Father Foucquet, and finds it problematic in relation to political institutions. The inflexible distribution system of food, for example, shows that the Chinese government, in order to sustain certain social equity, might sacrifice civility. In addition, it takes an absolute regime to distribute the fruits of labour properly and evenly to the general public. He blames the use of despotic power on China, but in a way he is not unaware of the necessity of using such power in ruling a country so vast as China. The discrepancy is even more explicit in the conclusion of this chapter as he remarks that "China is therefore a despotic state, whose principle is fear. Perhaps in the earliest dynasties, when the empire had not so large an extent, the government might have deviated a little from this spirit: but the case at present is otherwise".⁹² With this being said, it is not difficult to see that Montesquieu has been swinging back and forth between two opposites. To be more specific, China appears as a faultline in Montesquieu's taxonomy of governments.

Montesquieu's inconsistency in his views about China not only shows his own personal dilemma, but also a dilemma of his time. David Porter points out that although the Jansenists' ideas were constantly at odds with their Jesuit peers⁹³, "the two sides shared a sense of the urgency of the debate and of its significance for the future of the church".⁹⁴ Therefore, the debates went beyond the clash between Eastern and Western value systems, and became a battle of interpretations where different sects in Christian churches approached this object of China from distinct

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.156.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁹³ Apart from the fact that the Jesuits' almost exclusive access to China raised some eyebrows, the Jesuits' universalistic and humanistic belief that all men on earth had equal opportunities for God's grace were not shared by other religious factions, especially the Jansenists. The Jansenists, on the contrary, believed that God's grace could only be bestowed upon some men than others. The religious frictions between these two parties eventually resulted in power conflicts in French political debates. See Hung, Ho-Fung. "Orientalist Knowledge and Social Theories: China and the European Conception of East-West Differences from 1600 to 1900." *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 21, No. 3, pp. 254-280

⁹⁴ Porter. *Ideographia*. p. 133.

perspectives. The conflicting forces within Montesquieu's arguments epitomise the battling campaigns of values and beliefs. Therefore, Montesquieu at times praises the excellent custom of China where the emperor encourages people to tillage, and at others he complains about the ill-distribution of the agricultural produce to the people. Readers will also read that even though Montesquieu's rebuke of the despotic power in China is explicit, yet simultaneously he praises the legislators in China for being sensible and practical in "religion, philosophy, and laws".⁹⁵ Examples as such can be found throughout this particular work. Professor Ros Ballaster sees this condemnation of despotism in China as an explicit political agenda in Montesquieu. Ballaster proposes that Montesquieu's efforts are "the rationalist critique of established institutions and the advocacy of the separation of executive, legislative, and judicial power in the state as a necessary means of preventing the growth of despotism in Europe".⁹⁶ Moreover, just like Voltaire, Montesquieu had only limited information about China, as neither of them made a trip to China. With only limited resources, it is inevitable that Montesquieu is often self-contradictory and can only extend his arguments thus far.

The paradoxes captured and preserved in Montesquieu's writings about China showed the West's eagerness to pursue further this particular subject. As the popularity of this subject started to expand, it reached the general public, but probably in a rather different way. Porter argues:

Beyond the walls of the church and the academy, however, the period's encounter with the East proceeded under conditions of considerably less gravity. For those who did not share an overriding theological stake in its outcome, the meeting of cultures provided an occasion rather more for light-hearted pleasure than for philosophical angst.⁹⁷

As the intense academic and theological debates have reached their peak, contemporary intellectuals such as Voltaire, Montesquieu or Johnson were all seeking a way to render China accessible for European readers. Montesquieu's paradoxical interpretations interestingly sum up the long-lasting disputes in academic and theological worlds. With distinct

⁹⁵ Montesquieu. *De l'esprit des lois*. p. 280.

⁹⁶ Ros Ballaster. *Fabulous Orient: Fictions of the East in England 1662-1785*. Oxford: OUP, 2005.

⁹⁷ Porter. *Ideographia*. p. 134.

interpretations being made, it allows more possibilities to access China from different angles. In a way, the lack of one united view about China helped to prolong the Western's interest in this particular oriental empire, as these varied points of view widened the scopes of European audience and made China far more complex. In another way, without a uniform view, China appears to be contradictory. Whether it is from the perspective of Defoe, Du Halde, Dr. Johnson, Voltaire, or Montesquieu, China managed to bring up intricate intellectual dialogues and debates but in the meanwhile, these unreconciled images tangled up one another, and hindered the further exploration of China's authenticity. The day when China was still considered as a political entity governed by superior philosophical standards gradually came to its end. China was now growing less as a model of morality that could best represent human civilisation or good reasoning.

As China's philosophical substance thinned out over time, many writers started to treat this subject in various different ways. In the next chapter, we will closely examine Oliver Goldsmith's *The Citizen of the World*, in which Goldsmith challenges the existent omniscient image of the Chinese philosopher. His journey is not only his personal enquiries about the Western customs, but more importantly, the authorial attempt to highlight the cultural clashes and confusions between the two countries. The satirical tone that Goldsmith employs in the text shows that the reputation of China was declining. The perplexity and the shock the Chinese philosopher senses in his journey to the West indicate his vulnerability, which removes the veil of Chinese philosophical superiority in both individual and the country as a whole. And this time, the light that the philosopher can shine grows feebler.

From Mainland to Island: Oliver Goldsmith's Philosophical China in the Age of Knowledge Mapping

“Goldsmith, both in verse and prose, was one of the most delightful writers in the language [...] Everything in him is spontaneous, unstudied, yet elegant, harmonious, graceful, nearly faultless,”⁹⁸ William Hazlitt remarked of Oliver Goldsmith. Victorian novelist W.M Thackeray in his *English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century* did not hesitate to compliment Goldsmith's genius, and even called Goldsmith “the most beloved of English writers”.⁹⁹ In the *English Review* (1912), Frederic Harrison even called Goldsmith “the Mozart of English prose”.¹⁰⁰ There is no denying that in studies of eighteenth-century literature, Oliver Goldsmith is a literary figure impossible to ignore. Indeed, he mastered nearly every literary genre. From poetry to prose, from novel to journalistic essay, Goldsmith was able to write and never failed to bring his own glittering charm and gently ironic sense of humour.

Goldsmith remained a very popular writer until the early twentieth century, when doubts were cast on his originality because of direct borrowings from contemporary European literature, particularly French literature. Discussions of Goldsmith's borrowings from French literature have taken many forms over last few decades. Arthur Friedman's standard edition of *The Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, for example, gives an exhaustive study of Goldsmith's sources of borrowings from Jesuit missionary Jean-Baptist Du Halde to Voltaire. Critics have long argued that Goldsmith was no stranger to his sources. The fact that Goldsmith was the only translator of Voltaire's works acclaimed by Voltaire himself was an indication of Goldsmith's great command of French, not to mention his rich knowledge of contemporary French literature. Graham Gargett, in his essay “Goldsmith as Translator of Voltaire”, uses *The Bee* to demonstrate how Goldsmith dealt with Voltaire's work, and the differences between the original work and the translation. As Gargett points out,

⁹⁸ A. R. Waller and A. Glover. Eds. *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*. London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1904. 12 vols. Vol, 5, p. 375.

⁹⁹ W. M. Thackeray. *English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century*. London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1863. p 248.

¹⁰⁰ Frederic Harrison. *English Review*, xi, May 1912. pp. 178-8.

Despite the occasional slip due most likely to be the breakneck speed with which he must have worked, Goldsmith's translations not only demonstrate an extremely good understanding of the French text, they also reveal his already considerable mastery of English prose.¹⁰¹

Gargett's essay does not, however, quote many examples from the text, and indeed says only a little about how Goldsmith became acquainted with French literature. In another essay, "Oliver Goldsmith and Voltaire's *Lettres Philosophiques*", Gargett offers a better explanation as to how Goldsmith acquired his knowledge of French and French literature. He points out that "[i]n 1924, Arthur Lytton Sells established Goldsmith's substantial debt to French literature...In his essays, but also in his reviews for the *Monthly* and *Critical Reviews*, Goldsmith frequently drew on French sources."¹⁰² Gargett also highlighted the fact that "[r]ecent work has shown that the Ireland in which the future author [Goldsmith] grew up was far less culturally isolated from continental Europe than has often been supposed."¹⁰³ Indeed, evidence shows that Goldsmith as an Irish man of letters had probably established strong ties with contemporary French literature at a very early stage of his life. In early 1754, Goldsmith also visited the Netherlands, allegedly to further his medical studies, and in 1755 started a trip on the continent, travelling by foot through Flanders, France, Switzerland, Germany, and Italy for two years. This continental experience was later dramatised his poem *The Traveller* (1764), and inspired his original novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766). It was highly probable that during this period of time, Goldsmith deepened his knowledge of European literature, and also enhanced his gifts as both nature poet and a social satirist.

Goldsmith's extensive early readings in European literature serve as the bedrock of his later writings. When he first started his career as a journalist and translator in London in 1757, Goldsmith regularly consulted the European classics for inspiration, and his knowledge of contemporary European literature and society is on full display in his first published work, *An Inquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe* (1759). Despite the lack of critical attention paid to this first publication,

¹⁰¹ Graham Gargett. "Goldsmith as Translator of Voltaire". *The Modern Language Review*. Vol. 98 (2003), No. 4, p 851.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, p. 842.

¹⁰³ Graham Gargett. "Oliver Goldsmith and Voltaire's *Lettres Philosophiques*". *The Modern Language Review*. Vol. 96 (2001). pp. 952-963.

in 1760 a series of essays by Goldsmith began to appear in *The Public Ledger* and were quietly praised by critics and the reading public alike. Goldsmith later revised these essays and published them in two volumes entitled *The Citizen of the World, or, Letters from a Chinese Philosopher, Residing in London, to his Friends in the East* (1762). Among Goldsmith's major works, none more directly reflects the influence of European literatures—especially French literature—on his writing.

Goldsmith's great command of French and his keen interest in French cultural life made him no stranger to trends in his contemporary French literature and art, most notably the growing pull of "the Orient" on the French imagination. As trading ties with the East strengthened¹⁰⁴, the once wholly imaginary Orient gradually became a tangible, if still distant and highly mediated, reality for a growing number of Europeans, perhaps no more so than in France, where works like Montesquieu's *The Persian Letters* (1721) and the Marquis d'Argens' *The Chinese Letters* (1739) were enthusiastically received. In Montesquieu's *The Persian Letters*, two Persians are chosen to illuminate contemporary French life, while in d'Argens' *The Chinese Letters*, a Chinese philosopher gives insightful observations about France. Both works take the form of epistolary novels, serving as social satires on contemporary France. In fact, as William Appleton points out, "[t]he vogue for such literary spectators was established on the Continent largely because of actual visitors who, in addition to their social novelty, had the virtue of seeing Europe through fresh eyes."¹⁰⁵ Consequently, it was not surprising when, in 1760 and 1761, Goldsmith took advantage of this trend and started a new series of essays about a Chinese philosopher's journey to England and his social observations of metropolitan London. Following the styles of those works, Goldsmith's *The Citizen of the World* proved to be a more multi-dimensional and culturally complex work, because it penetrated contemporary attitudes toward the East and gave a new spin to the genre of social satire. It not only aroused English public curiosity about China at that time, but also sparked new debates about China within British society

¹⁰⁴ Since the founding of East India Company in the early seventeenth century, the trade with the East had changed drastically the material culture in Europe. The fascination toward the East covered not only finished products but also the process of production. See Maxine Berg, "Goods from the East" in *Luxury & Pleasure in Eighteenth Century Britain*. Oxford: OUP, 2005.

¹⁰⁵ William Appleton. *A Cycle of Cathay: The Chinese Vogue in England during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1950, p.123.

itself. Goldsmith's consistently conservative stance against luxury and the rise of consumerism in *The Citizen of the World* was quite new at the time. Strongly influenced by Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), Goldsmith believed that the excessive pursuit of luxury eroded China's capacity for economic and social development because it retarded individual moral development (Letter LXXXII).

Nevertheless, among Goldsmith's various sources of inspiration Marquis d'Argens' *Lettres Chinoises* was by far the most important. Translated into English in 1741 under the title *Chinese Letters: Being a Philosophical, Historical, and Critical Correspondence between a Chinese Traveller at Paris and His Countrymen in China, Muscovy, Persia and Japan*, Goldsmith was to borrow extensively from d'Argens' work. The editor of the standard edition to Goldsmith's works, Arthur Friedman, in his introduction to *The Citizen of the World* remarks that "[p]ossibly the decisive factor was that from the time he began the series Goldsmith was acquainted with the Marquis d'Argens' *Lettres Chinoises*, and from this work, whenever inspiration failed him, he was able to draw a sentence, a paragraph, or even an entire letter."¹⁰⁶ Despite all his plagiarising, however, Goldsmith still managed to show his true genius by rendering the character of his Chinese philosopher more vivid and more humorous than that of d'Argens. Sioeu-Tcheou, d'Argens' Chinese traveller, is a staid and sometimes stubborn character whose narrative tone is far more serious than Goldsmith's. The cultural comparisons in d'Argens' work thus look heavy and preachy by comparison. While the French d'Argens put all his efforts into satirising French society, Goldsmith maintains a tone of English entertaining lightness. After a very careful and comprehensive reading of both Goldsmith's *The Citizen of the World* and Marquis d'Argens' *Lettres Chinoises*, R.S. Crane and H. J. Smith, in accord with this argument, state:

[Goldsmith's] finer gift of humorous invention, his greater concern for character and incident, his less "interested" preoccupation with morals and manners—these qualities, which colored even his borrowings, gave to his work as a whole an individuality quite impossible to confuse with that of the author of the *Lettres Chinoises*. In short, while his borrowings from d'Argens help to explain many

¹⁰⁶ Oliver Goldsmith. *Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*. Ed. Arthur Friedman. 5 vols. Oxford: OUP, 1966. Vol. 2, p. x. Hereafter, *Works*.

details in the substance, and a few features of the scheme, of *The Citizen of the World*, and throw an interesting light on its writer's method of composition, they account for none of the traits which constitute the essential originality of Goldsmith's work.¹⁰⁷

Crane and Smith's juxtaposition of the two texts help readers to clarify the problem of Goldsmith's borrowings. Even more importantly, in their conclusion they also evaluate his ability as a writer to bring his own flavour to the work. Crane and Smith's research also shows that the success of *The Citizen of the World* did not occur by chance. Goldsmith adapted the epistolary style, one of the earliest forms of fiction writing, to tell the life of this Chinese philosopher, Lien Chi Altangi, in England, which made the story more readable by adding some elements of suspense to the correspondents' narrations. The strong sense of morality in d'Argens' character was replaced by Goldsmith's lighter irony. Goldsmith did not simply paraphrase or copy the aforementioned works; he breathed new life into the persona of the Chinese philosopher. Through this character, Goldsmith allowed himself to articulate his observations of contemporary English society. Moreover, it gave him, as an Irishman, a chance to talk and act from a complete outsider's point of view, a viewpoint from which he could be honest and blunt without causing undue offence.

Although d'Argens' *Lettres Chinoises* served as the prototype of the Chinese philosopher, an even more obvious influence on Goldsmith was Horace Walpole's *Letter from Xo Ho, a Chinese Philosopher at London, to his Friend Lien Chi, at Peking* (1757). Walpole's work was a political pamphlet of five to six pages, using a dialogue between a Chinese philosopher Xo Ho and his friend Lien Chi to depict the contemporary political atmosphere in Britain. Through Xo Ho, Walpole argued for the superiority of Chinese over English rationalism. Although such a brief political pamphlet did not allow any real character development, it appears to have influenced Goldsmith's decision to use a Chinese narrator. Indeed, before Goldsmith made his final decision and started his composition, he hesitated over the nationality of the narrator. Goldsmith biographer James Prior informs us that Goldsmith first chose a Moroccan native to be the hero of his story, and only some time later made a conscious decision to

¹⁰⁷ S. Ronald Crane and Hamilton Jewett Smith. "A French Influence on Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World*". *Modern Philology*, Vol. 19 (1921), No. 1, pp. 83-92

switch the character to a Chinese philosopher. Prior continues to suggest that “[a] Chinese was then chosen as offering more novelty of character than a Turk or Persian; and being equally advanced in the scale of civilisation, could pass an opinion on all he saw better than the native of a more barbarous country.”¹⁰⁸ The fact that Goldsmith made such a conscious decision about his choice of Chinese narrator rather than some ill-defined “Easterner” is a curious detail worth exploring: to what extent did Goldsmith think that this wise man from the East could use his cultural heritage to illuminate contemporary British society? More importantly, if this was what Goldsmith had in mind, did he succeed or did he fail? And how specifically Chinese was his chosen persona?

Percy's China

To explore further Goldsmith's choice of a Chinese philosopher, it is inevitable to exclude Thomas Percy's presence.¹⁰⁹ Like many of his contemporaries, Percy became rather interested in the topic of “China” and things Chinese after the massive amount of Jesuits reports and accounts on China had started to appear since the beginning of the seventeenth century. Many intellectuals joined force to tackle this topic from various aspects, including politics, philosophy and economy. Although there is no clear evidence to show when Percy began to grow interested in this topic, yet it is known that in 1758, Percy borrowed a manuscript from an East India Company representative who used to work in Canton, Captain Wilkinson, whose uncle, James Wilkinson, first translated *Hao Kiou Choann* from Chinese into English in 1719. Based on this manuscript, Percy largely revised and edited, and engineered extensive footnotes and annotation to the novel. And when the book was published in 1761, Percy added three more sections to the novel, inclusive of “The Argument or Story of a Chinese Play”, “A Collection of Chinese Proverbs”, and “Fragments of Chinese Poetry”. The work, with the title *Hao Kiou Choaan, or the Pleasing History*, was published under the

¹⁰⁸ *Works*, Vol: p.14.

¹⁰⁹ In Alda Milner-Barry's “A Note on the Early Literary Relations of Oliver Goldsmith and Thomas Percy”, she clarifies that Percy first got acquainted with Goldsmith when Percy was in London seeking to publish a Chinese novel—namely *Hao Kiou Choaan*—that he had been working on. Milner-Barry also thoroughly examines the textual interrelationship between Goldsmith's and Percy's works. Milner-Barry suggests that “[Percy's *Hao Kiou Choaan*] may have been at least one of the factors that led Goldsmith to adopt the Chinese medium.” See Alda Milner-Barry. “A Note on the Early Literary Relations of Oliver Goldsmith and Thomas Percy.” *The Review of English Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (Jan., 1926). pp. 51-61.

writer-publisher Robert Dodsley, whose own work, *The Oeconomy of Human Life*¹¹⁰, claimed to be transmitted from China by an English gentleman, was by then a wildly successful work on the market. From a publisher's point of view, Dodsley might have hoped that the success of Percy's work would do well commercially in the ascendant tide of the Chinese mania, and perhaps to mutually benefit his own work in the long run. Percy's multi-volume work, nevertheless, proved to be a disappointing fiasco as the book was unpopular, a coincidental contrast to the more successful concurrent publication of the similar topic, Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World*.

One thing that separates Percy's novel and most of his contemporary works about China or the Orient is his clear, almost indifferent position, especially when other works were mostly catering to the popular Chinese taste. Percy consciously avoided the over-generalised framework constantly seen in popular oriental fantasies which often managed to combine the elements of both "pleasure" and "instruction". Percy's novel has the tendency to go for moral instruction, leaving the novel less like the oriental fantasies but more like the contemporary popular sentimental novels such as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*¹¹¹ or *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady*¹¹², whose focus often fixes on virtue and morality, instead of sensual pleasure. Percy's *Hao Kiou Choann* saw the similarities between the shared virtue values between British and Chinese cultures as the eventual marriage between the hero (Tieh-chung-u) and the heroine (Shuey-pinh-sin) after a series of ordeals take place in the novel. In other words, to the Britons, or at least to Percy himself, *Hao Kiou Choaan* would stand alone as a Chinese novel that shared English values, but to the Chinese readers, *Hao Kiou Choaan* is a work that belonged to late-Ming and early-Qing literary fashion when many scholars became disappointed and dissatisfied with the corrupt politics and started to psychologically reward themselves with earthly goods such as fame, fortune, and above all, beauties.¹¹³ That is to say, fundamentally, the fashionable scholar-beauty romances may be regarded quite differently in

¹¹⁰ Robert Dodsley. *Oeconomy of Human Life*. London: Robert Dodsley and James Dodsley, 1750.

¹¹¹ Samuel Richardson. *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*. London: Messrs Rivington & Osborn, 1740.

¹¹² Samuel Richardson. *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady*. London, 1748.

¹¹³ Li Zhi-hong. "The Archetype of 'Beauties' in Late-Ming and Early-Qing Scholar-Beauty Romances". *Journal of National Taipei University of Education*. Issue 18:2, 2005. pp. 25-62.

China and Britain, yet Percy employed this particular novel to reflect his ideas of China. As a result, *Hao Kiou Choann* followed a British literary form upon which Percy built his Chinese romance through his adaptations of Chinese morality and virtue, which unfortunately lessened the fantasy elements and thus reduced the work's mass appeal.

In the work, Percy cited Du Halde's *General History of China* (1736) extensively in his annotation to explain particular instances in the text, although Percy oftentimes used footnotes and annotation to provide his own comments which are excursions from the major theme of the novel, and with these excursions Percy seemed to be trying to establish his version of China's national character. Through out the book, Percy positioned himself to his English readers as a disinterested, authoritative mediator or transmitter of Chinese culture, in an attempt to present *Hoa Kiou Choaan* as a "curious specimen of Chinese literature". Regarded himself as the role of a dutiful editor, Percy claims in the preface that he would neither "conceal" nor "extenuate" the "fault" of the work, and would like to leave it to critics to "decide its merit."¹¹⁴ In the meanwhile, he argues that the novel should be considered as "a faithful picture of Chinese manners, wherein the domestic and political economy of the vast people is displayed with an exactness and accuracy to which none but a native could be capable of attaining". And in order to enhance his English readers' understanding of this peculiar culture, Percy self-apologetically places the lengthy footnotes of his as a useful—if sometimes digressive and excessively elaborate—tool to lend insight to the "peculiar ways of thinking" of the Chinese whose customs and manners are "so remote from our own that they frequently require a large detail to render them intelligible" to the English readers. Percy's authorial and editorial interventions showcased his ambition to represent China as a country that naturally grows the sense of respects for craft and subtlety and its people as "the most subtle crafty people in the world", although he made his English as well as the European, Christian values as the first and foremost priority in terms of morality and virtues as the pages turn. This sets the tone for Percy's *Hao Kiou Choaan*, which, interestingly, works as a contrary contrast to Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World*. On the one hand, although Goldsmith stresses that the Chinese morality is the major focus of his book, he still manages to incorporate the element of oriental fantasy

¹¹⁴ Thomas Percy. *Hao Kiou Choaan; or, The Pleasing History*. 4 Vols. London: Robert Dodsley, 1761. Vol. I: xiv-xv.

in his work, adding humour and delights to the storyline; whereas in Percy's work, as the title may have suggested to its readers that the work could be a "pleasing" story, the fantastical or the delightful elements are oftentimes left out, placing the main concern of the story on the moral conducts and the virtues. On the other hand, while Goldsmith's work seeks the universality and shared values in both cultures and proposes that through constant communication and comprehension, the marriage (or at least, the friendship) between British and Chinese cultures could be achieved, Percy's work, however, emphasises the peculiarities and absurdities of the Chinese culture which entail elaborate and explanatory intellectual interventions to be mediated to common English readers.

Apart from its high similarities to English sentimental novels which value and reward virtues above all other elements, in the novel of *Hao Kiou Choaan*, Percy should have thought highly of the Chinese moral standards, yet quite interestingly, Percy still takes more pride in the European standard of ethics. For example, in the second volume of the work, when speaking of the Chinese morality, Percy thinks that Christian value holds a higher position than the Chinese one, because Christian values "recommend the forgiveness of injuries and the return of good for evil" while in Chinese cultures, even the noble philosopher Confucius, Percy believes, does not "insist upon" the idea of "recompens[ing] hatred with benefits" because it is "the virtue and the piety of a noble [or enlarged] breast".¹¹⁵ Percy goes on citing the Christian proverbs from the Bible to illustrate the "glowing benevolence" of the Christian moral maxims; the Chinese proverbs are, by comparison, "contemptible". Percy's stance, accordingly, seems unusual not only in a work like this but also among his contemporaries. First, Percy tries to detach himself from his involvement as a dedicated translator and editor, but what readers see in the work is his implicit passion coming through the pages by giving thorough comparisons between the cultures of Britain and China. Second, in a work that celebrates Chinese ethics and morality, Percy's reserved and slightly dismissive attitude towards Chinese merits and nobility renders his materials seemingly forced and at times less genuine as they should have been, which further reduces the pleasantry in the book. Third, while Percy holds Christian values over Chinese ones, it suggests Percy's moderate scepticism about Chinese philosophy, or to be more specific, the Chinese

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* Vol. II: 51.

philosophy as the Jesuit missionaries penned it. Percy's scepticism can be seen as a response to the "rites controversy" over early Jesuit missionary works in China when missionaries such as Matteo Ricci argued the compatibility of certain Chinese rites within the doctrines of monotheistic Christianity. Ricci and his peers were considered "accommodationists" whose tolerance for Chinese religious practices was often questioned, criticised, and challenged by other Catholic orders such as Dominicans, Franciscans and Augustinians and then by the Roman Church itself. Ricci and these early missionaries, in order to retain their strong and nearly influential monopoly in China to spread Christianity, found it necessary for them to adjust to the complex Chinese religion, a blend of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. However, when transmitting their accounts back to Europe, they intentionally fabricated and tailored their adaptations to the Chinese theological beliefs to the European context, in the hope of winning over more support for their missionary works in China and in the Far East. Although there was power politics involved among different religious sects in the "rites controversy", this was fundamentally a theological conflict and debate over the ancestor worship and the celebration of Confucius in China.¹¹⁶ Percy is sceptical of the compatibility of the Chinese religious practices in the true Christian theology, but he finds it even more dubious the unshaken sage image of Confucius in the hands of these missionaries' construct. Ultimately, Percy has never been consistently hostile towards things Chinese, but it is fair to say that Percy's work was incorporated in a trending process of casting more doubts over the Jesuit constructs of China and the Chinese images.

Percy's constant inconsistency showcases several significances. First of all, despite *Hao Kiou Choaan's* distinctions in form and content from Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World*, both works, published only one year apart, can be understood as the result of the contemporary British and Continental struggle among the craze for chinoiserie, the passion for the Chinese civilisation, and the latest revelation and doubts about the authenticity of the Jesuits' accounts of China. The uncertainty and the indecisiveness lasted, and paved their ways straight into late eighteenth-century Britain's public unsettled opinions about China. When

¹¹⁶ For more discussions on Chinese "rites controversy", please see William Appleton. "Confucius, The Good Governor". & "The Dissenting Opinion". *Cycle of Cathay*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1951. Also, see Ros Ballaster. "'Bearing Confucius' Morals to Britannia's Ears': China". *Fabulous Orientals*. Oxford: OUP, 2005.

China ceased to open up to foreign contacts, it missed the opportunity for more immediate renewal, and put itself in predicament as more European countries, led by Britain, gained insight into the reality of China and saw their chances to claim their profits by declaring war to the collapsing empire. Second, Percy's reluctance to adopt popular forms to deal with his materials showed his ambition to tackle this topic in his own way, and to even more actively intervene in the debates about China and things Chinese at his time. With *Hao Kiou Choaan*, his original take on the topic of China may have led to commercial failure and the lack of attention from neither reviewers nor readers, but Percy was not entirely defeated. One year later, a series of essays were published under the title of *Miscellaneous Pieces Relating to the Chinese*, in which Percy collected and edited various China-related subject matters by different writers, covering topics from gardening to the history of Christianity in China, and even Percy's very own linguistic analysis of the Chinese language. Mostly, this work was considered as a reference book about the already available European knowledge of China from the publisher's point of view; the book, however, was yet again another disappointing commercial failure that left nearly no immediate impact on the market and on readers. One of the main reasons that contributed to this failure is that the work was largely based on the existent, popular, Eurocentric mapping of knowledge in regard to China, and less of Percy's own original ideas. Readers interested in the topic would have been rather familiar with these materials. That being said, even Percy's original ideas did not seem to stir too much interest among his contemporary readers. For instance, one of the essays, "Dissertation on the Language and Characters of the Chinese", deals with the origin of the language and the act of writing. Percy sees the greatest difficulty in learning how to write in Chinese characters because the ancient, hieroglyph quality of the particular language may seem to arrest the development of young intellectual minds, since to master a good amount of the language can be rather time-consuming, especially for those who wish to enter the civil service or the political system by taking national exams. Percy remarks that European alphabets are easier to learn in terms of spelling, writing, and speaking, allowing the intellectuals to be more free-minded to go into more complicated, abstract thinking. To Percy, Chinese language is fundamentally "inferior" to English language. Dwelling upon Du Halde's observation that "the very make of the Chinese

mouths is different from that of Europeans”¹¹⁷, Percy furthers his point by mimicking how the Chinese people would have pronounced certain English words, which gives comical—if at times racial and deteriorative—texture to his analysis.

Percy’s relation to the topic of China is thus a peculiar case not only in his time but also in modern time. Although Percy’s China-related works only made little stir in contemporary Britain, the works appealed to many modern critics. William Appleton sees some curious parallel between Percy’s *Hao Kiou Choaan* and Goldsmith’s *Citizen of the World* in certain parts of the stories as both works heavily rely on the Jesuit missionaries’ narratives. Although Percy’s passion for China in the novel may seem fiery yet distanced at the same time, Appleton argues, Percy’s interest in this topic was only “transient” before he dedicated much more labour to “the northern antiquities”.¹¹⁸ In a way, the topic of China was not much more than a transition for him to tap into his construct of the literary history of English poetry. James Watt sees Percy’s distanced and slightly hostile attitude towards China as a response to contemporary debates on “taste, aesthetics, and luxury”, and how the chinoiserie, when fortified by the concurrent Rococo style, helped to form new public aesthetical sentiment towards consumption, which later defined modern consumption. Percy’s special connection to and resistance against the hybrid cultural products of both Gothic and Chinese styles. Watt argues that Percy takes on an indirect method to “strip away the alluring exotic façade of Chinese-style cultural productions” especially commemorated by the Jesuits.¹¹⁹ Ros Ballaster attaches the literary and culture value to Percy’s *Hao Kiou Choaan* and admires the novel’s ability to “produce hybridity and identification” across cultures in its readers. Although Percy wished to distance himself from his intent involvement of the novel, Ballaster commends Percy for his capability to “retain a balance of strangeness and familiarity, exoticism and domestic morality”.¹²⁰ Among all modern critics, however, no one has achieved what David Porter has done with Percy. Porter dedicates a whole chapter to Percy’s studies on sinology, and scrutinises how Percy’s preparations for the topic of China could eventually help produce and establish the methodological framework for

¹¹⁷ Du Halde, Vol. 1: 22.

¹¹⁸ Appleton, p. 142.

¹¹⁹ Watt, p. 102.

¹²⁰ Ballaster, pp. 240-242.

his later masterpiece *Reliques of English Poetry*.¹²¹ Porter argues that Percy started working on the preparations and the translation of *Hao Kiou Chooan* while assembling his writing materials for *Reliques*. For some unknown reasons, Percy gave up on his original proposal for a volume of “Specimens of the Ancient Poetry of Different Nations”, and began his multi-volume work. Because of the overlapping time and materials, Porter proposes, there underlines an implicit interrelationship between *Reliques* and *Hao Kiou Chooan*: while *Hao Kiou Chooan* provided to Percy the ultimate foreignness and the exotic, it also contributed to laying strong foundation for the construct of the Englishness and the merits of modern English literature to rise and shine. Through repeated and challenged inquiries about the nature of China in Jesuit constructs, and through his continuous attempts to conclude his self-contradictory arguments, Percy managed to transform the landscape of British literary imagination and extensively stretched his influences on the poetic geniuses of Britain, introducing the true lustre of English poetic heritage to upcoming, free-spirit Romantic poets, such as William Blake, William Wordsworth, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge who later returned the favour by providing a revolutionary insight into the realm of English poetry. As Percy’s *Reliques* defines what Englishness is and is considered “epoch-making work of English romanticism”¹²², it is fair to conclude that his handling of China in the previous work is used to provide a contrasting model and the research framework for his construct of national character and identity.

Although Percy and Goldsmith might constantly draw from the same or at least similar sources, their portrayals of China have been very different. In spite of Percy’s more or less direct influences, Goldsmith’s more fun, interesting, and less preachy viewpoint constantly outshone Percy’s more cautious and reserved stance. At any rate, Percy has no intention to adapt and to improve the Chinese tale, but to reproduce what the story is about. On the contrary, Goldsmith sees a great opportunity for him to embrace the simplicity and the lightness of the Chinese literature as well as the Chinese philosophy. This could be the reason why the travelogue of Goldsmith’s Chinese philosopher was eventually more popular than Percy’s moral-driven Chinese romance.

Wise Man from the East

¹²¹ 1765.

¹²² Porter, pp. 154-183.

Apart from Percy's influence, there are still some reasons that might support Goldsmith's choice of the Chinese philosopher. China in the eighteenth century was regarded as a nation of reason, as Ros Ballaster points out, "[t]he association of the Chinese with advanced powers of reason is usually made through the figure of Confucius."¹²³ In fact, as early as 1593, Matteo Ricci translated *Si Shu* (Four Classics) into Latin, and Jesuit missionaries, in 1662, introduced *Ta Hsueh* (Great Learning) and *Lun Yu* (Analects of Confucius) to the Western world. In the late seventeenth century, more translated texts of Confucian maxims were brought into the France and England. The reputation of Confucius soared. William Appleton argues that "[t]he publication of these translations [of Confucian Doctrine] proved as stimulating to the Europeans as the Jesuits had hoped [...]. In England, the Confucian legend appealed to both orthodox and heterodox thinkers. Its materialism appealed to the English deists; the humanism and benevolent patriarchy endorsed by Confucius, and the perfected, if mummified, Chinese way of life gratified solid Tories and cautious Whigs. Confucius was the supreme apostle of the orderly *status quo*."¹²⁴ It is against this general backdrop that Goldsmith's choice of a Chinese philosopher as narrator should be viewed. Goldsmith's "editor's preface" helps to explain the choice of a Chinese philosopher:

The truth is, the Chinese and we [Europeans] are pretty much alike. Different degrees of refinement, and not of distance, mark the distinctions among mankind. Savages of the most opposite climates, have all but one character of improvidence and rapacity; and tutored nations, however separate, make use of the very same methods to procure refined enjoyment. (*Works*, II, 14)

In Goldsmith's mind, China was one of the "tutored nations" whose civilisation may be considered a proper civilisation that was pretty much like European cultures. The geographical distance would not cause any difference about the "refined enjoyment" that both China and Europe shared. Moreover, with the help of available sources - Friedman further cites Louis Le Comte's *Nouveaux mémoires sur l'état présent de la Chine* (1698) and the English translation of J. B. Du Halde's *A Description of the Empire of China* (1735) as important influences - Goldsmith would be

¹²³ Ros Ballaster. *Fabulous Orient: Fictions of the East in England 1662 -1785*. Oxford: OUP, 2005, p 243.

¹²⁴ Appleton. *A Cycle of Cathay*. p 41.

able to make his Chinese character at least minimally convincing.

In addition to the ready availability of sources and the contemporary fashion for all things Chinese, there was still another reason why Goldsmith chose a Chinese rather than Moroccan or other traveller. As the editor of this series, Goldsmith assured his readers that “[t]he metaphors and allusions are all drawn from the East. Their formality our author carefully preserves. Many of their favourite tenets in morals are illustrated.” Goldsmith first implicitly alerted his readers to Chinese morals. Then he went on and commented on the author that “[t]he Chinese are always concise, so is he. Simple, so is he. The Chinese are grave and sententious, so is he. But in one particular, the resemblance is peculiarly striking: the Chinese are often dull, and so is he.” Behind this remark, Goldsmith was suggesting to his readers something important about the character of this Chinese philosopher: while carrying through and comparing all the cultural differences, the Chinese philosopher, though a little upright and tense, would never hesitate to make comments on everything he witnesses. This character, as a result, is bound to carry moralising as well as entertaining effects, and to inform readers of the differences between these two cultures.

Goldsmith’s brief comment on the author and the Chinese accurately reflected the mixed attitudes toward China in the eighteenth century. Ros Ballaster comments that “[t]he one consistent comment on China, whether positively or negatively construed, was that its political and moral order was both unchanging and ancient.”¹²⁵ Later in the editor’s preface, Goldsmith also offered an anecdote about the editor’s dream. He imagined a “Fashion Fair” on the frozen-over Thames, and “every author who would carry his works there might probably find a very good reception.” The editor was worried about the safety, and was astonished by how these heavy cargoes and carts managed to enter the fair. After quite a few cargoes, the editor made the decision to enter the fair as well. The editor went on with his dream:

The success of such numbers at last began to operate upon me. If these, cried I, meet with favour and safety, some luck may, perhaps, for once attend the unfortunate. I am resolved to make a new adventure. The furniture, frippery and fireworks of China, have long

¹²⁵ Ballaster. *Fabulous Orients*. p. 243

been fashionably bought up. I'll try the fair with a small cargo of Chinese morality. If the Chinese have contributed to vitiate our taste, I'll try how far they can help to improve our understanding. But as others have driven into the market in waggons, I'll cautiously begin by venturing with a wheel-barrow. Thus resolved, I baled up my goods and fairly ventured; when, upon just entering the fair, I fancied the ice that had supported an hundred waggons before, cracked under me; and wheel-barrow and all went to the bottom. (*Works*, II, 15)

In the paragraph above, Goldsmith pointed out that in his time, Chinese items were a trend, a fashion to be displayed. As Maxine Berg points out, in the eighteenth century, “a large-scale trade in oriental porcelain aimed to this taste [for chinoiserie]... Remarkably large-scale production processes and highly sophisticated networks of trade and distribution made these goods familiar parts of the material culture of the middling classes and the gentry over all parts of Britain and her empire. Such domestic ornamental goods, satisfying a taste for the exotic East, inspired Europe's and especially Britain's own industrial and design responses.”¹²⁶ Such writings on China were numerous and particularly fashionable as “frippery”, something more decorative than substantial. Goldsmith hesitated to join the fashion fair, showing his discontent with other writings that treated China as a mere fashion trend. Yet at the same time, Goldsmith was worried about whether he could successfully promote his “Chinese morality”. At the end, he mused that his wheelbarrow full of Chinese morality “all went to the bottom” of the Thames. This is an interesting metaphor, because it shows that, in Goldsmith's mind, these Chinese items would eventually be swallowed up by British culture. Goldsmith was also trying to give a warning to contemporary writers writing on China: such writing could be as loud and beautiful as Chinese fireworks, but was destined to disappear shortly afterwards.

On the fate of his own writing, however, Goldsmith need not have worried. *The Citizen of the World* was an outstanding piece of work and was received as such. Despite Goldsmith's resourceful borrowings, or indeed because of them, the essays demonstrated Goldsmith's capability for breathing life into his characters. If d'Argens gave the bone structure to this Chinese philosopher, and Walpole lent the name to Goldsmith's

¹²⁶ Berg, *Luxury & Pleasure in Eighteenth Century Britain*. p. 49.

character, undoubtedly Goldsmith put some flesh onto it and made this character more authentic, more believable, more “Chinese”. Though by no means do we intend to suggest that all the facts about China cited in the work were correct, what Goldsmith undoubtedly achieved in the series was to offer his readers a new view of China.

Still, what gave *The Citizen of the World* its contemporary appeal was the author’s satire of English society. Goldsmith in some parts of the book took on the philosopher’s Sino-centric perspective to examine social phenomena in Britain, openly criticising much of what he saw but always retaining a good sense of humour. Prior to Goldsmith, most of the writings on China took the Eurocentric point of view, whether positive or negative. In d’Argens’ *Lettres Chinoises*, for example, the protagonist is more serious and stern, and makes a great many hasty comments on what he sees or experiences in France; in short, the character lacked depth. More importantly, the character takes a Eurocentric stance and is thus less convincing. What Goldsmith managed to do was to take an alternative Sino-centric stance. Through his comparisons and contrasts, the erudition of the philosopher (and the author) is shown, and it gave his common readers a chance to, in the editor’s words, “improve our understanding”. As Goldsmith feared that his Chinese morality may be overloaded and weighty for most Britons, he cleverly eschewed the seriousness of d’Argens’ work. Goldsmith’s Chinese philosopher is not omniscient, and very often his comments are heavily coloured by his inveterately Sino-centric ideas. As a long-travelling philosopher, Lien Chi might have a rich knowledge about the world, yet most of the time he is unable to get very far outside his own traditional Chinese worldview.

This contradiction and struggle between Euro-centric and Sino-centric cultures is one of the most compelling characteristics of *The Citizen of the World*. It presents the inevitable cultural misconceptions and shocks with pleasantry. For example, in Letter III, the Chinese philosopher talks about his fresh experiences in London:

I consider myself here as a newly created being introduced into a new world, every object strikes me with wonder and surprise...The most trifling occurrences give pleasure, till the gloss of novelty is worn away. When I have ceased to wonder, I may possibly grow wise; I may then call the reasoning principle to my aid, and compare those

objects with each other which were before examined without reflection.

Behold me then in London gazing at the strangers, and they at me; it seems they find somewhat absurd in my figure; and had I been never from home it is possible I might find an infinite fund of ridicule in theirs; but by long travelling I am taught to laugh at folly alone, and to find nothing truly ridiculous but villainy and vice...but I soon perceived that the ridicule lay not in them but in me; that I falsely condemned others of absurdity, because they happened to differ from a standard originally founded in prejudice or partiality". (*Works*, II, p.p. 21-22)

Here, these fresh experiences brings "wonder and surprise", but he is aware of—and at the same time trains himself to—"laugh at folly alone, and to find nothing truly ridiculous but villainy and vice". The protagonist seems to call on his readers to use "the reasoning principle" and asks them to find pleasure among "the most trifling occurrences", though they might find them "somewhat absurd" from this cultural perspective. Most important of all, upon seeing this different culture, the philosopher is "gazing at the strangers, and they at me". This first-person versus third-person perspective highlights the most impressive quality of this work, for it forestalls the possibility of adopting a Euro-centric take on Chinese writings. And furthermore, this work has a very good insight into the Sino-centric ideology that had haunted Chinese literati for generations.

For centuries, Chinese people believed that China was at the centre of the world, and this geopolitical sense emerged quite early. The middle and lower reaches of Yangtze River were generally considered as "Zhong-Yuan" or "Zhong-Tu", meaning "Midland", and this idea later transformed to "a country in the centre of the world". And from then on, this strong geo-political sense of definition made Chinese people believe that people who lived outside this geographical area were "hua wai zhi min", meaning "people beyond the reach of civilisation". These people of various races might be called by different names, but could all be reduced to "barbarians" of one kind or another. China may have had a steady stream of encounters with foreign cultures throughout her history, but these contacts somehow never really increased China's understanding about her neighbours, still less countries on the other side of the world. In

this sense, people from the West were still considered barbarous. The protagonist in *The Citizen of the World* had this stereotypical conception, and he was here to—if not to correct—modify how he perceived the world and hopefully, to modify how the rest of the world perceived him and his native culture.

In Letter XIV, the philosopher gives an interesting anecdote about his receiving an invitation from “a lady of distinction” (II, 63). He thinks of this meeting being arranged by a young, beautiful lady who is strongly attracted by his charisma, but the lady who invites him turns out to be insatiably curious about “exotic” China. The philosopher describes their meeting:

As I was dressed after the fashion of Europe, she had taken me for an Englishman, and consequently saluted me in her ordinary manner; but when the footman informed her grace that I was the gentleman from China, she instantly lift herself from the couch, while her eyes sparkled with unusual vivacity. “Bless me! Can this be the gentleman that was born so far from home? What an unusual share of *somethingness* in his whole appearance. Lord I am charmed with the outlandish cut of his face; how bewitching the exotic breadth of his forehead. I would give the world to see him in his own country dress. Pray turn about, Sir, and let me see you behind. There! there’s a travelled air for you. You that attend there, bring up a plate of beef cut into small pieces; I have a violent passion to see him eat. Pray, sir, have you got your chop-sticks about you? It will be so pretty to see the meat carried to the mouth with a jerk. Pray speak a little Chinese: I have learned some of the language myself. Lord, have you nothing pretty from China about you: something that one does not know what to do with: I have got twenty things from China that are of no use in the world.” (*Works*, II, 63-64)

This paragraph satirically depicts how most people in Goldsmith’s time looked on China. When they first meet, the lady of distinction cannot even tell him apart from other Englishmen, but with the introduction by her footman, the way she looks at him changes drastically from an “ordinary manner” to eyes sparkling “with unusual vivacity”. Her uses of adjectives such as “unusual”, “bewitching”, “outlandish”, or “exotic” illustrate some common attitude shared by her contemporaries. Moreover, out of curiosity

she begs the philosopher to do things that would meet her satisfaction. But in the process, the philosopher degenerates from a person into an object being appreciated and observed. This lady of distinction also shows her Euro-centric prejudices by saying she owns twenty pieces of Chinese objects “that are of no use in the world”, while later the Chinese philosopher explains to her the actual utility of these objects. The lady even refuses the philosopher’s explanations, and several times she insists that the philosopher must have been mistaken. She believes that the authenticity of China, in this anecdote, does not come from the philosopher’s words and knowledge, but from her collectable items, as well as the way these items acquire decorative significance through export and acquisition in Britain. As soon as she rejects the philosopher’s explanation, she rejects the possibility of enhancing her understanding of “paltry” China.

The Chinese philosopher’s meeting with the lady of distinction ends in mutual irritation and frustration. Once he finds out that the lady of distinction is impossible to communicate with, he leaves with dignity:

I could not but smile at a woman who makes her own misfortunes, and then deplores the miseries of her situation. Wherefore, tired of acting with dissimulation, and willing to indulge my meditation in solitude, I took leave just as the servant was bringing in a plate of beef, pursuant to the direction of his mistress. (*Works*, II, 65)

Goldsmith uses Lien Chi’s encounter with the lady of distinction to mock contemporary Sinophiles, most of whom blindly follow fashion without further examining authentic Chinese culture. Although he knew readers would be well aware of the non-Chinese identity of the author, Goldsmith’s first important goal was not actually to correct popular misconceptions about China or promote positive aspects of Chinese culture as he understood them, but simply to encourage the English to live up to Enlightenment values and start looking at China more empirically, through the goggles of reason, rather than to fall lazily back on vague and dreamy projections. In other words, while the “Chinese moralities” mentioned in the editor’s preface were eventually intended to serve as moral lessons for common readers once the Enlightenment message of the virtues of empirical observation had first been driven home, the wrapping was a light and entertaining Chinese philosopher’s story in London, which

made it easier for an Irish writer like Goldsmith to express his own opinions without causing too much offence.

Another interesting cultural encounter in this book is when Lien Chi's son, Hingpo, is made a slave in Persia. Hingpo depicts Persia as a land governed by a tyrant, a land of barbarians. Hingpo describes Persia as the counterpart of rational, civilised China, and together they complete the false dichotomy of two "Orientals" in eighteenth century European thought, one a nation of reason (China), the other a nation of barbarity (Persia). As Hingpo joins the correspondence with his father, the contrasts between civilised China and barbarous Persia become even starker. Lien Chi's words of consolation are mostly moral lessons, but do comfort Hingpo at a very difficult time. The fact that Goldsmith parallels the narrations of the son and the father is a deliberate choice of narrative technique. In this essay, he stresses the contrast between the two poles of civilisation and barbarity to build up dramatic tension throughout the book. Goldsmith's delicate handling of this extreme polarity help make *The Citizen of the World* warrants further attention. In the next section, we will learn more about the polarity and duality elements Goldsmith arranged, and explore what Goldsmith managed to achieve with these seemingly contradictory elements.

Polarity and Doubling

Throughout *The Citizen of the World*, Goldsmith uses different dichotomies to create tension, draws comparisons and produces comic effects, all in the hope of conveying his moral lessons to the readers. As we have just observed, the polarity between civilisation and barbarity is one obvious example. The geographical polarity of England and China is also thrown into relief by the clash of cultures in the book. The polarities, nevertheless, do not ultimately serve to highlight cultural differences but to give readers a chance to ponder and further enquire into English manners. Goldsmith uses the tales of the Chinese philosopher in the hope of having an influence on moral, social, and political reform in England. Even in this series of "Chinese moral tales" intended to hold a mirror up to English society, Goldsmith does not at any point suggest that Chinese philosophy is the only solution to the problems of Western civilisation.

Rather, Chinese rationalism is invoked as one possible remedy. Robert H. Hopkins suggests that

Goldsmith was a citizen of the world who deplored the excessive glorification of either oriental or European culture and who, while recognising the external differences between civilisations, would find human nature in all ages and all cultures very much the same. It is this attitude which underlines his parody of the oriental fad.¹²⁷

Goldsmith's primary concern throughout is social reform. Take Lien Chi's son for example. In Letter VI, readers are informed by Fum Hoam that the Emperor of China takes absolutely no delight in Lien Chi's departure, so the Emperor kills Lien Chi's wife and daughter and sells Lien Chi's son, Hingpo, into slavery in Persia. In the next letter, readers feel sympathy for Lien Chi's misfortune when the Chinese philosopher's cries of pain are overwhelming. Lien Chi's circumstances also remind readers of the sufferings of Job in the Bible. And as the plot progresses, in Letter XXXV when Lien Chi's son Hingpo joins the correspondence, a discussion about civilisation and barbarity ensues. Hingpo looks to his father for consolation as he writes:

[...] I confess that I find my soul shrink with my circumstances. I feel my mind, not less than my body, bend beneath the rigours of servitude; the master whom I serve grows every day more formidable. In spite of reason, which should teach me to despise him, his hideous image fills even my dreams with horror [...] Into what a state of misery are the modern Persians fallen! A nation of once famous for setting the world an example of freedom, is now become a land of tyrants, and a den of slaves. (*Works*, II, 152)

In Hingpo's short account, readers will be affected by his sufferings and feel the terror of living among barbarity as well as under tyranny. Hingpo's words can also be taken as an indirect reflection on the despotism of China. In addition, Hingpo's comment on the fall of Persia also prompts introspection and alerts English readers to the possible decline of civilisation if not properly sustained. Goldsmith's sense of polarity, as we can see, was never unchanging, and it was highly probable

¹²⁷ Robert H Hopkins. *The True Genius of Oliver Goldsmith*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1969.

that polar opposites may collide, compromise, and ultimately reach a new dialectical balance.

Although Goldsmith criticises China in a very subtle way, more often, however, he deliberately makes fun of British culture. From art to politics, the latest trends to the oldest traditions, this Chinese philosopher is very outspoken and knowledgeable. To make this character more convincing and solid, for instance, in Letter III, Goldsmith humorously uses Lien Chi to compare the Western sense of beauty with the Chinese. Lien Chi is shocked to see English women as he comments:

[T]he ladies here are horribly ugly; I can hardly endure the sight of them; they no way resemble the beauties of China. The Europeans have a quite different idea of beauty from us: when I reflect on the small-footed perfections of an Eastern beauty, how is it possible should have eye for a woman whose feet are ten inches long? [...] Dutch and Chinese beauties, indeed, have some resemblance, but English women are entirely different: red cheeks, big eyes, and teeth of a most odious whiteness, are not only seen here, but wished for: and then they have such masculine feet as actually serve *some* for walking! (*Works*, II, 24-25)

The philosopher goes on with two more paragraphs on the “unkind” beauty of English ladies. Lien Chi’s comments might have been too hasty and careless, but after some observations, in Letter VIII, Lien Chi’s attitude toward the English ladies changes. To his friend Fum Hoam he states that

In spite of taste, in spite of prejudice, I now begin to think their women tolerable; I now can look on a languishing blue eye without disgust, and pardon a set of teeth even though whiter than ivory. I now begin to fancy there is no universal standard for beauty. The truth is, the manners of the ladies in this city are so very open, and so vastly engaging, that I am inclined to pass over the more glaring defects of their persons, since compensated for by the more solid yet latent beauties of the mind.

Lien Chi’s ridicule appeals to British readers, not because of its political correctness, but because of the misconception generated from his point of view. The philosopher’s first comment is so Sino-centric that it

demonstrates the limited perspective that he has. But the philosopher is very well adjusted and soon learns from his prejudice to appreciate the beauty in difference. Lien Chi demonstrates that through reasoning, the cultural relativity of taste can be appreciated. This instance showcases Goldsmith's uses of polarity: he not only shows his readers the perceptual workings of cultural difference, but he also shows that these differences can be bridged. Goldsmith's design also makes this character of the Chinese philosopher more humane.

Instances of polarity can be easily found throughout the book. From religion to politics, from paintings to books, luxury to virtues, funerals to theatres, history to contemporary events, polarities of all forms are well demonstrated by Lien Chi. His Sino-centric point of view faces challenges on various occasions. Nonetheless, as the philosopher's knowledge of the world increases, the polarities no longer seems as wide as he first thought. Near the end of the series, in Letter CXXI, Lien Chi expresses the dilemma of writing about his travels in England:

Whenever I attempt to characterise the English in general; some unforeseen difficulties constantly occur to disconcert my design; I hesitate between censure and praise: when I consider them as a reasoning philosophical people, they have my applause; but when I reverse the medal, and observe their inconstancy and irresolution, I can scarcely persuade myself that I am observing the same people. Yet upon examination, this very inconstancy, so remarkable here, flows from no other source than their love of reasoning. (*Works*, II, 468)

Lien Chi's hesitancy between "censure and praise" reflects Goldsmith's conflicting attitudes towards Britain. Goldsmith's own doubts often compromise or blunt Lien Chi's otherwise insightful criticism. It is true that Lien Chi does sometimes criticise certain aspects of Chinese culture, such as despotism and the excessive pursuit of luxury, while most of Lien Chi's comments focus on the peculiarities of British society; China embodies rationalism, and Britain should look up to her. However, in this letter, it is curious to discover that Goldsmith also makes uses of Montesquieu's ideas about China in *The Spirit of the Law* (1748) for his final enquiry about the different characteristics of men and government. For example, In *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu holds a neutral view

on despotism in China. Montesquieu believes that despotism gives the monarchy in China a strong hierarchy, and helps maintain social order, which, however, does not seem to fit at all with Goldsmith's purposes as a satirist and critic of British society.¹²⁸ Besides this, Lien Chi further comments:

The man who examines a complicated subject on every side, and calls in reason to his assistance, will frequently change; will find himself distracted by opposing probabilities and contending proofs: every alteration of place will diversify the prospect, will give some latent argument new force, and contribute to maintain an anarchy in the mind. On the contrary, they who never examine with their own reason, act with more simplicity. Ignorance is positive, instinct perseveres, and the human being moves in safety within the narrow circle of brutal uniformity. (*Works*, II, 468)

Again, Goldsmith indirectly refers to Englishmen as a people of reasoning while he points out Asiatic people as living “within the narrow circle of brutal uniformity”. The philosopher lists both the advantages and disadvantages of reasoning, and carries on the debate. He believes that the reasoning quality of Englishmen can make positive reforms possible while the non-reasoning aspect of the Chinese mentality helps to maintain stability. Lien Chi also addresses the disadvantages of Asiatic and English governments. He comments that “original errors are thus continued, without hopes of redress, and all marks of genius are levelled down to one standard, since no superiority of thinking can be allowed its exertion in mending obvious defects”. When “acting from the immediate influence of reason”, the problem is to find a solution that satisfies all different parties. We might say that Goldsmith invokes cultural polarities only to find a middle ground between them, yet we also have to point out that because of occasional incoherence, it decreases the force of Lien Chi's criticism.

¹²⁸ *The Spirit of the Laws* was first published anonymously by Montesquieu. Its influence outside France swiftly increased as it was translated into several different languages. The English translation was completed by Thomas Nugent and was published in 1750. Montesquieu himself spent nearly twenty years researching and writing this work, in which it covers a wide range of topics from political system to religion about different countries. For example, Montesquieu's ideas about China were neutral and sensibly fair. While he condemns that “China is therefore a despotic state, whose principle is fear” (Vol. I, Chap. XXI, 138), he also suggests that “[t]he principle object which legislators of China had in view, was to make the people live in peace and tranquillity. They would have people filled with a veneration for one another” (Vol. II, Chap. XVI, 335).

Another instance of polarity is shown in characterisation, which is best manifested when Lien Chi becomes acquainted with a gentleman in black, who is later known as the “man in black”. These two characters first meet up in Letter XIII, when the Chinese philosopher pays a visit to Westminster Abbey, and the “man in black” voluntarily guides Lien Chi around. As the plot develops, the “man in black” becomes, in Lien Chi’s words, “my usual companion, guide, and instructor” in London. The relationship between the Chinese philosopher and the “man in black” is particularly intriguing. In Letter XXVI, Lien Chi writes to Fum Hoam and portrays the character of the “man in black”:

Though fond of many acquaintances, I desire an intimacy only with a few. The Man in black, whom I have often mentioned, is one whose friendship I could wish to acquire, because he possesses my esteem. His manners, it is true, are tinctured with some strange inconsistencies; and he may be justly termed a humorist in a nation of humorists. Though he is generous even to profusion, he affects to be thought a prodigy of parsimony and prudence; though his conversation be replete with the most sordid and selfish maxims, his heart is dilated with the most unbounded love. I have known him profess himself a man-hater, while his cheek was glowing with compassion; and, while his looks were softened into pity, I have heard him use the languages of the most unbounded ill-nature. Some affect humanity and tenderness, others boast of having such dispositions from Nature; but he is the only man I ever know who seemed ashamed of his natural benevolence. He takes as much pains to hide his feelings, as any hypocrite would to conceal his indifference; but on every unguarded moment the mask drops off, and reveals him to the most superficial observer. (*Works*, II, 108-9)

As Lien Chi describes the character of the “man in black”, he points out the differences between the two. Lien Chi is a very outspoken person, whose sense of humour is sometimes prejudicial as he comments on British manners. By contrast, the “man in black” is more reserved and demure, and often speaks in an ironic tone. Their contrasts compliment and compensate each other, and through their conversations and comments, readers will be more aware of Goldsmith’s primary aim: to take advantage of this character of Chinese philosopher to boost his true moralistic concerns.

The bond between Lien Chi and the “man in black” is so close that these two characters can be considered as doubling each other. In the footnote to Letter XXVII, Arthur Friedman remarks:

Mrs Hodson, Goldsmith’s sister, makes the following statement in her narrative of his life: “I now must request the reader will read himself in the Charrector of the Man in Black in the Citizen of the world he there gives an account of his Fathers Death which I wd wish to omit & many other incidents of his life as I am certain that Charrector of his own.” Percy in his Memoir took this statement to mean that the Man in Black represented Goldsmith’s father, and he has been followed in this identification by subsequent biographers and editors. But as Miss Balderston has pointed out, Mrs. Hodson apparently wished to identify the Man in Black with Goldsmith himself, and the history of the Man in Black does bear important resemblances. (*Works*, II, 112)

Friedman’s words are important. While some biographers identify the “man in black” as Goldsmith’s father, others argue that it is Goldsmith himself. Washington Irving, for instance, remarked that the ‘Man in Black’, in some respects, is a counterpart of Goldsmith”.¹²⁹ James Watt suggests:

Many of Lien Chi’s letters refer to his companionship with the “man in black,” an English gentleman, sometimes interpreted as another authorial persona, who introduces himself to Lien Chi at Westminster Abbey. Although numerous eighteenth century narratives depict newcomers to London being accompanied around the metropolis by apparently well-meaning guides, Goldsmith’s work offers one of the relatively few instances where the intentions of the self-appointed instructor seem to be entirely honorable. *The Citizen of the World* certainly exploits the comic potential of the man in black’s misanthropic “humor,” but at the same time it develops a bond between Lien Chi and his guide, a bond founded on the fact that, as the editor’s preface puts it, “The Chinese and we are pretty much alike”.¹³⁰

While most scholars have argued that the Chinese philosopher is

¹²⁹ Washington Irving. *Oliver Goldsmith: A Biography*. London: John Murray, 1849. p. 20.

¹³⁰ James Watt. “Goldsmith’s Cosmopolitanism”. *Eighteenth Century Life*, 30:1 (2006), 56-75.

Goldsmith's persona, Watt's article argues the "man in black" is a second other authorial persona. As a guide and an instructor, the "man in black" comes to the assistance of Lien Chi when the Chinese philosopher needs an authentic account of British manners. The characters of the Chinese philosopher and the "man in black" are vastly different. Yet, near the end of the series, their bond becomes clear. The Chinese philosopher feels "uneasiness at breaking the connections I have formed since my arrival", so he invites his companion to join him on his journey. This bond is even further strengthened when the son of Lien Chi and the niece of the "man in black" finally meet up in London and plan to get married soon afterwards. The marriage undoubtedly brings the characters of Lien Chi and the "man in black" closer, but this begs the question: if both characters can refer to the author Goldsmith, how can their relationship shed new light on our understanding of this work and the author?

As we have previously mentioned, *The Citizen of the World* is a work in which the author Goldsmith tried to promote his "Chinese moralities". However, in the series of correspondences, interactions and conversations between Lien Chi and the "man in black", the reader eventually comes to understand that the real goal is to encourage contemporary readers to explore and to ponder English manners. A "Chinese" lens was convenient because it represented a different, but also highly civilised, culture. Nevertheless, underneath the Chinese persona, Goldsmith, as an Irish writer, speaks from an outsider's point of view to observe the reality of English society. Facing the enquiries of the Chinese philosopher, the "man in black" always responds in a sarcastic tone, which reflects Goldsmith's occasional bitter sense of humour towards English society. Though in *The Citizen of the World* Goldsmith only mentions Ireland a handful of times, the Irishness he concealed was transferred to characters to express, in Goldsmith's own phrase, "the absurdity of Ireland".

This true authorial intention is well demonstrated in another of Goldsmith's early works. In June 1760, Goldsmith contributed a series of essays to the *Royal Magazine*, entitled "A Comparative View of Races and Nations", in which he first used the phrase "a citizen of the world". In these three essays, Goldsmith recounts his travels in Europe and speaks as an experienced traveller who learns a great deal of value about cultural diversity on his journey. It is noteworthy that the content of these three essays is quite similar to a few early letters from *The Citizen of the World*.

In the first essay of that series, Goldsmith wrote:

These are some of the many advantages we enjoy above the rest of mankind; nature pours her gifts round us, and we only want a proper temper to enjoy them. I should esteem it my greatest happiness, could my travels conduce to form such a temper; could they make one individual more happy in himself, or more useful to society; could I enlarge one mind, and make the man who now boasts his patriotism, a citizen of the world; could I level those distinctions which separate mankind; could I teach the English to allow strangers to have their excellencies; could I mend that country in which I reside, by improvements from those which I have left behind. (*Works*, III, 68)

As readers might notice, this series was composed at almost the same time as Goldsmith started his series of *The Citizen of the World*. This brief paragraph is particularly interesting and significant for our exploration of Goldsmith, not only because it bears some similarities with *The Citizen of the World*, but also because it shows readers the author's intention to “teach the English to allow strangers to have their excellencies” and to “mend that country in which I reside, by improvements from those which I have left behind.” More importantly, he wants to enlarge his readers’ minds and help them to broaden their horizons beyond narrow patriotism.

The doubling of the Chinese philosopher and the “man in black” essentially serves this same purpose. The “man in black” serves to modify and qualify the opinions of the Chinese philosopher when they sound too extreme. Goldsmith explains in a subsequent paragraph that

In all the circle of knowledge, there is not perhaps a more pleasing employment, than that of comparing countries with each other; if the traveller happens to be possessed of talents equal to the enquiry; who knows where to dilate, and where to be concise; who with a well-directed understanding passed hastily through the howling wilderness or sandy desert, but enjoys the cultivated spot, the peopled valley, with an abiding delectation. (*Works*, III, 69)

As in the prior discussion, the Chinese philosopher is eligible for the job that Goldsmith offers. Besides, the sense of humour that Lien Chi and the “man in black” both possess in abundance allows comparisons among countries to be made “with an abiding delectation”. Moreover, it allows

Goldsmith to work out his true Irish identity through the scope of a foreign traveller as well as an outsider. It is true that Goldsmith does not present his Irish identity in *The Citizen of the World* so much as in *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) or in *The Deserted Village* (1770). However, the intriguing relations between Lien Chi and the “man in black” serve to demonstrate the complex relation between Ireland and England, or more specifically, the complex relation between the Irish writer and metropolitan London. After all, the character of the Chinese philosopher is the perfect incarnation of “the other”, a perspective of peculiarity. Whether Goldsmith intended to use this work to mock the fad of the Sinophiles at that time or not, the “otherness” of the Chinese philosopher reflects, as Michael Griffin suggests, the “otherness” of Goldsmith’s own Irish identity. Griffin thus argues that “when Goldsmith wrote of China, the Chinese people, or Chinese modes of landscape gardening or decoration, therefore, he was very probably referring to concerns far closer to home.”¹³¹

Griffin’s interesting argument is essential to our exploration. However, his elaboration on the relationship between Goldsmith’s orientalism and Irish origin lacks extensive textual evidence. Christopher Brooks’ article “Goldsmith’s *Citizen of the World*: Knowledge and the Imposture of ‘Orientalism’” gives us a more convincing argument:

Goldsmith plays with this notion [of stereotyping] not only at Altangi’s expense but whenever he introduces Altangi to an English sinophilic character. When this occurs, detecting the imposture of orientalism requires a double effort, for neither Altangi nor his hosts are what they appear to be. Given that both sets of imposters are created by an Irishman living in England, the entire question of “otherness” is called into question: perhaps Altangi’s “orientalism” is a guise for Goldsmith’s “Irishness”, for both character and author comment on (directly or indirectly, respectively) the place of the foreigner in the insular-island ethos of England.¹³²

Brooks’ notions in the article may seem overwrought at times, but they certainly clarify our doubts about Goldsmith’s use of the character of the Chinese philosopher. There is no further evidence that can explain why

¹³¹ Michael Griffin. “Delicate Allegories, Deceitful Mazes: Goldsmith’s Landscapes”. *Eighteenth-Century Ireland / Iris an dá chultúr*, Vol. 16 (2001), pp. 104-117

¹³² Christopher Brooks. “Goldsmith’s *Citizen of the World*: Knowledge and the Imposture of ‘Orientalism’”. *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, 35 (1993), pp 124-144.

Goldsmith conceals his Irish identity under the persona of the Chinese philosopher (and it is highly probable that he has no intention of denying his Irishness at all). Nevertheless, if Goldsmith, as Brooks suggests elsewhere in the article, intentionally uses this series as a vehicle of satire to attack the pretentious Sinophiles of his day, he might deliberately take advantage of this trend of Sinophilia to promote his moral lessons. Furthermore, it would be of more commercial appeal for readers to see a Chinese traveller's observations than an Irish writer's ideas about British society, particularly in a time when the society was caught up in the passion for Chinese culture. The rotating narrations of Lien Chi and the "man in black", as well as the self-contradictions and the inconsistency about the characterisation and plot in the series, can thus be seen as the authorial struggle between self-consciousness and the desire to include the viewpoint of "the other". This authorial involvement of Oliver Goldsmith assures us that he is actually very much aware of his readership, a readership that belongs only to metropolitan London. In the next section, we will examine how this metropolitan setting plays a significant role in the context.

A Wanderer in the Metropolis

As a geographical site where cultures encounter and confront, London is absolutely crucial to our understanding of *The Citizen of the World*. Despite the fact that many critics may call it a plagiarism of the Oriental tales, or associate it with Orientalism, what this series of essays carries is actually more than a pseudo-take on a Chinese traveller's journey. Whether it is a work designed to promote the author's morality lessons in a disguise of a Chinese philosopher for commercial appeal, or is better thought of as a self-aware work by an Irish writer caught in between conflicting senses of belonging and otherness, the centrality of the cityscape of London within the series is impossible to neglect.

As the book title suggests, Goldsmith's Chinese philosopher resides in London. This idea of "residence" suggests more than a passing stop. In the very first letter of the series, Lien Chi is introduced to an anonymous merchant in London by a merchant in Amsterdam who used to work in a factory in Canton. Goldsmith offers us a very clear idea about the routes of this "Chinese philosophic wanderer": he first travels by land from China via Siberia to Europe, and then takes the sea route from Rotterdam to

London (Goldsmith himself wrote up his two-year travelling experience in Europe soon after his return to England). The route map of Lien Chi reminds us of *The Traveller* (1764) in particular, in which the poet-narrator gives his opinions on European countries and all the way back to England. From the middle part of the poem, the poet-narrator starts to make his observations on Holland and then England. Goldsmith spends thirty-six lines on Holland, calling it a country where “all the good from opulence that springs, / With all those ills superfluous treasure brings, / Are here display’d. Their much-lov’d wealth imparts / Convenience, plenty, elegance, and arts; / But view them closer, craft and fraud appear, / Even liberty itself is barter’d here” (*Works*, IV, 261). These lines confirm to us that Amsterdam was a centre of international transport city at that time, and it was a commercial city flooded with all sorts of merchandises and luxury. Here, we also find an oft-repeated theme in many of Goldsmith’s works: luxury. Goldsmith’s view of luxury, as our prior discussions have suggested, is rather conservative and pessimistic, for most of the time he thinks of luxury as a corrupting influence resulting from growing international trade. These lines also correspond to Letter II when Lien Chi realises his merchant friend from Amsterdam conveys some extra money into his baggage before his departure for England, he politely rejects by responding that “[Y]ou have been bred a merchant and a scholar; you consequently love money better than I. You can find pleasure in superfluity; I am perfectly contented with what is sufficient.” Lien Chi’s words imply that Amsterdam is regarded a metropolis too fond of money and a city of excessive luxury and consumption, and as a person who is “contented with what is sufficient”, he euphemistically condemns luxury.

As a prosperous, vice-riddled international trading hub, Amsterdam serves as a contrast to London. In Letter II, upon his first arrival at London, Lien Chi comments on the city:

Judge then how great is my disappointment, on entering London, to see no signs of that opulence so much talked about abroad! wherever I turn, I am presented with a gloomy solemnity in the houses, the streets, and the inhabitants; none of that beautiful gilding which makes a principal ornament in Chinese architecture. The streets of Nankin are sometimes strewed with gold leaf; very different are those of London: in the midst of their pavements a great lazy puddle moves muddily along; heavy laden machines with wheels of unwieldy

thickness crowd up every passage, so that a stranger instead of finding time for observation, is often happy if he has time to escape from being crushed to pieces. (*Works*, II, 19)

Lien Chi's description of the gloomy solemnity of English cityscape emphasises the differences between Amsterdam and London. Amsterdam is more a commercial city while London as a metropolis is in its early phase of industrialisation, and more of a serious place. Apart from this, Lien Chi's complaint is actually Goldsmith's concern: the growth of industrialisation would allow urban people no time for thinking and self-examination. It is also a reminder from Goldsmith to his readers that the English are fond of reasoning (as suggested in *The Traveller* and *A Comparative View of Races and Nations*).¹³³ The urban context, therefore, is devised for readers who share the same cityscape. In other words, the association between urban context and its readers may be of more interest for readers in London.

Of course, the intended readers for this series of pseudo-letters are, literally, the recipients of these letters, namely Fum Hoam, Hingpo Lien Chi, and the anonymous merchant in Amsterdam. However, as Eugene Chen Eoyang argues in *The Transparent Eye: Reflections on Translation, Chinese Literature and Comparative Poetics* (1993), "Goldsmith is attempting to stretch the sensibilities of his actual readers, the London cognoscenti who affect cosmopolitanism." Later, Chen advances his argument by citing Wayne C. Booth's argument and remarks that the reader of the series is actually "'a citizen of London' who enjoyed the 'Chinese letters' which satirised folly and greed in *The Public Ledger*, is indeed 'a citizen of the world'." (pp 274-275). London is a geographical site of particular significance for Oliver Goldsmith, not only because it is the capital of the nation, but also it is the capital of his patriotic nationalism, because readers, as citizens of London, might find themselves eventually flattered by all these comparisons among various nations and races. With his comic ignorance upon seeing London, along with his exotic cultural background, Lien Chi as a character, compared to other

¹³³ In *The Traveller*, the poet-narrator addresses that "[s]tern o'er each bosom Reason holds her state, / with daring aim irregularly great." In *A Comparative View of Races and Nations*, the narrator remarks that "[the English] are distinguished from the rest of Europe by their superior accuracy in reasoning, and in general called the nation of philosophers by their neighbours of the continent; this superiority of reason is only the consequence of the result; and pursue truth wherever it may lead, regardless of the result." (*Works*, III, p85)

Londoners in the series, is much more fully developed. In other words, these vaguely-portrayed Londoners in the series can be regarded as the actual readers in London who may partake in the life and journey of Lien Chi in an inexplicit way. Through the character of Lien Chi, they feel more secure in venturing to criticise different aspects of contemporary English society.

The bond between the author and readers, consequently, is parallel to the bond between the traveller and the metropolitan city of London. The greater pleasure the traveller finds in London, the more joy his readers may feel in this work. The more excitement his readers experience in the series, the more vigour the philosopher may perceive in London. It is thus when the philosopher is no longer taking an interest in London that the series comes to an end. In Letter CXXII, Lien Chi tells his friend Fum Hoam that “[m]y long residence here begins to fatigue me; as every object ceases to be new, it no longer continues to be pleasing.” As soon as the thrill of seeing the new world is gone, Lien Chi finds himself talking about nothing but “trifles”. As Wayne C. Booth points out,

[i]t is in the nature of this genre that it will not permit a developed drama any more than it will permit a really serious development of philosophy, a sustained and challenging comment or satire, a deep analysis of the psychology of Londoners or of their social structure, a developed literary criticism, or indeed any other kind of discourse that requires scope for its perfecting.¹³⁴

Nevertheless, Lien Chi sometimes confesses that his comments are too “hasty”, the nature of the genre would allow him to make his observations from a very superficial level. The lack of more penetrating observations might also be pardoned because it is from an outsider’s angle. Furthermore, if Lien Chi considers his social observations mere trifles, what he can guarantee to “his friends in China” is his discovery of a new world. After all, this genre by definition means “to try” or “to attempt”. The trifles may be matters of little value, but they are everyday topics that people can talk about. The lightweight criticism, the brevity, the personal sensibility, the differences in reasoning, and the glittering sense of humour altogether can promise to the urban readers of this work a new-found pleasure by

¹³⁴ Wayne C Booth. “‘The Self-Portraiture of Genius’: ‘The Citizen of the World’ and Critical Method.” *Modern Philology*, Vol. 73, No 4. pp S85-S96.

parodying the exotic as well as local exoticism.

As we have illustrated, the tale of this “citizen of the world” is intended for the readers in metropolitan London. And because of its urban context, it allows more possibilities of reviewing people from different backgrounds. As a result, the series covers many topics, such as religion, politics, trade, gender, art, luxury and medicine. It is Goldsmith’s authorial intention to cover a wide range of subjects. And more importantly, whether it is the author’s ostensible purpose to make this series a dramatic social parody or not, through these comparative views of cultural phenomena, what Goldsmith does approach is an eventual universal standard for mutual appreciation. Although now and then in the series, Goldsmith may drop his mask of Lien Chi and show his inconsistency and his “boast of patriotism”, this does not, however, unduly detract from the author’s central cosmopolitan thesis. In the next section, we will examine how Goldsmith’s cosmopolitanism works in the text and see how it may shed new light to our understanding of Goldsmith.

Cosmopolitanism versus Nationalism

Modern critics agree that *The Citizen of the World* is, for its time, a work of profound cosmopolitan sensibility. Wayne C. Booth, for example, argues that this is a work that has commercial appeal to a reader who is

(a) An Englishman—that is, citizen of a nation that on the whole is the most generous, most enlightened, most advanced, best governed, in a word the most “polite” of all (e.g., letter 4); (b) A cosmopolitan—that is, like the author I am a citizen of the world. Though patriotic, I am too sophisticated to talk without irony of my patriotism, and I really take all mankind into my tolerant, amused vision; (c) A penetrating critic of the folly and greed that surround me, even here in England: I am the kind of person who can savor both the comic misreadings committed by Lien Chi Altangi and the comedy of British idiosyncrasy viewed in a universal light (e.g., letter 45).¹³⁵

Booth is right about Goldsmith’s cosmopolitan ideas, but his hidden patriotism is equally worthy of note in the series. As Booth has suggested, Goldsmith’s patriotism is not always on the surface. As a very

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

sophisticated author, most of the time in the series Goldsmith expresses his patriotism in a very non-straightforward way. This is particularly clear when Lien Chi, as the spokesperson of Goldsmith, draws his readers' attention to the differences between English and continental manners.

Though implicit, Goldsmith's patriotic nationalism is so passionate that England is at times made to look far more civilised than her continental neighbours. As Tao Zhijian points out,

European nations, granted, have had their share of civility, but, alas, Russia is "relaxing into pristine barbarity"(192); the German empire is "on the eve of dissolution"(193); "Sweden, . . . though now seemingly a strenuous assertor of its liberties, is probably only hastening on to despotism;" the Dutch are "without a friend to save them in distress, and without virtue to save themselves, their government is poor, and their private wealth will serve to invite some neighbouring invader;" only the French "are imperceptibly vindicating themselves into freedom," which, nevertheless, cannot yet be guaranteed (194).¹³⁶

In *The Citizen of the World*, Dutch manners are often cited and contrasted with English manners. More than once in the text Goldsmith attacks the excessive commercial development in Holland. Letter CXVIII, for instance, is a letter from Fum Hoam to Lien Chi, in which Fum Hoam complains to Lien Chi about the meanness of Dutchmen in the Japanese court and criticises the Dutch merchants "have raised my dislike to Europe in general". Through these comparative views of European continental countries and England, indirectly Goldsmith compliments the superiority of English manners. Even the harsh criticism of contemporary English society is Goldsmith's vehicle for passing his moral lessons on to his readers in the hope of carrying through possible social reforms.

Goldsmith's fundamental concerns expressed in *The Citizen of the World* can also be seen in his other works. As *The Vicar of Wakefield* demonstrates, it preludes a change of time and the hardship to sustain the traditional rural value of life. This domestic novel might be sentimental, melodramatic and even sometimes comic, through the often-failed and

¹³⁶ Tao Zhijian. "Citizens of Whose World? Goldsmith's Orientalism." *Comparative Literature Studies*: 33, 1996. pp.15-34

constantly-challenged character of Dr. Primrose (who gives “laws” to this “little republic” of his family), readers would realise that however he attempts to live up his British rural ideal, he can hardly remain his past mode of life. The patriarchal structure of society can no longer stay unchanged as what he wishes to arrange for his sons and daughters fall short of his expectations. As the spiritual guide of the family, even when his children “all untimely fall[ing]” about him, he “continue[s] a wretched survivor in the midst of ruin.” Although critics often identify the character of Dr. Primrose as Goldsmith’s own father, however, just like the “man in black” in *The Citizen of the World*, this is a character is partly Goldsmith himself. As *The Vicar of Wakefield* may oftentimes remind us of *The Book of Job* in the Bible, the undefeated spirit of Dr. Primrose reinforces his religious and moral belief in the past value of life, very similar to Job’s belief in God. Goldsmith’s passion for the nation is thus obvious to see: he has to act and write as the spiritual and moral guidance, if not for the country, but at least for his readers. The fact Dr. “Primrose” seems misfortunate implies the best bits of English culture suffer from constant challenges and inevitable changes. This implication of name can even further illuminate Goldsmith’s implicit patriotic nationalism.

Now that we have examined the patriotic nationalism in the work, it helps us to move on to the discussion of the cosmopolitan ideas in the text. As the book title suggests, it is about *The Citizen of the World*, not *A Citizen of the World*. It is obvious that Goldsmith intends to make Lien Chi *the* citizen of the world *par excellence*. If we say that through these various cultural exchanges Goldsmith wishes to reach a universal standard of cosmopolitanism, then the most obvious weakness is Goldsmith’s neglect of other non-European cultures and his superficial understanding of China. Nevertheless, in the series, there are many cases where Lien Chi is absolutely furious and indignant with those who have assumed knowledge about China. Although the primary sources of Goldsmith’s China are borrowed, Goldsmith tries his best to sustain the authenticity of his character. If he didn’t, the character of Lien Chi would not be tenable. We should also find Lien Chi’s indignation about the authenticity of China’s image very interesting. While Lien Chi is angry with people about the presumption of knowledge about China, he is also making assumptions about the English. He presumes that England is a country of civility, and this false assumption, in fact, leads him to be even more disappointed and upset when he finds out that some Englishmen have absurd opinions about

China. In a way Lien Chi's fury is to serve the purpose of increasing the awareness of the authentic China as well as of lessening the over-heated popular passion for chinoiserie.

While Lien Chi's descriptions of China might be incorrect, the Chinese philosopher does not hesitate to come to his own defence. However, Lien Chi's strong defence of his own "authenticity" has evoked criticism from many modern scholars. Christopher Brooks calls *The Citizen of the World* an "imposture", while Tao Zhijian followed Edward Said in calling the book as "an exotic locale of strangeness and abnormality—in European eyes" (34).¹³⁷ It is definitely true that Goldsmith attempts to include his patriotic nationalism in an implicit way, yet it is also impossible to deny that Goldsmith as a metropolitan writer has his cosmopolitan concerns. These cultural exchanges between China and England echo the cosmopolitan ideas abroad in the age of Enlightenment. If we examine Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws*, we find that many of Goldsmith's ideas that Goldsmith acquires can be traced back to it. In the preface to *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu writes:

The most happy of mortals should I think myself, could I contribute to make mankind recover from their prejudices. By prejudices I here mean, not that which renders men ignorant of some particular things, but whatever renders them ignorant of themselves.

It is in endeavouring to instruct mankind, that we are best able to practice that general virtue, which comprehends the love of all. Man, that flexible being, conforming in society to the thoughts and impressions of others, is equally capable of knowing his own nature, whenever it is laid open to his view, and of losing the very sense of it, when this idea is banished from his mind.¹³⁸

From Montesquieu's passage, we can extract the central thesis of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism: the belief in a universally acceptable, "general virtue". Goldsmith's design of the Chinese wanderer in England can thus be considered to be in accord with Montesquieu's ideas. To Goldsmith, this series of essays is not about giving his readers the most

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Montesquieu. *The Spirit of the Laws*. Trans. Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, Harold Samuel Stone. Cambridge: CUP, 1989. p. XLIV.

accurate information, but it is about reaching a possible conciliation and mutual comprehension through cultural exchanges. Critics like Tao might argue that “what China in reality is Goldsmith neither knew well nor cared; what is useful to him is that China is either the same, or different, in reference to Britain or Europe. Even where he did have some knowledge, he would readily manage it to make the evidence fit his binary schema. Goldsmith's cosmopolitanism, as applied to the "Orient," becomes nothing short of "Orientalism"; and Orientalism is a thinly covered form of colonialism”¹³⁹. Yet this is to over-simplify the work and Goldsmith's cosmopolitan intentions.

Goldsmith's effort to de-exoticise and to familiarise the character of Lien Chi is an evident reflection to his cosmopolitan ideas, since the author does not model his character in the way that other Orientalist-writers did in his time. This intentional distinction by the author may also have motivated Goldsmith to change the title of the series from *The Chinese Letters* to *The Citizen of the World* when it was published in book form. We may recall that towards the end of the book, when Lien Chi decides to set off again and continue his world trip, he invites the “man in black” to go with him. There is also the upcoming marriage of Lien Chi's son, Hingpo to the niece of the “man in black”, Zelis. Both the friendship and the marriage symbolically invoke the power of wedding the best elements of different cultures to reach a universal cosmopolitan standard of world citizenship. The mechanism of the whole book is, after all, as James Watt illuminates in his essay “Goldsmith's Cosmopolitanism”¹⁴⁰, “to grasp the utopian potential of cross-cultural contact” beyond Goldsmith's personal patriotic passion, even though “the time is not ripe for the realisation of this potential” (65). Factually, Goldsmith could have paid more attentions to Hingpo's life as a slave in Persia if he had ever intended to build up his own idea of Utopia. As Goldsmith originally planned to use a Moroccan native as the protagonist of *The Citizen of the World* to make the effort, he might have collected some materials for his writings. However, as Hingpo's account as a slave in Persia falls short of reader's expectation, Goldsmith's description of barbarous Persia seems somewhat monotonous. Thus, Goldsmith fails to realise his Utopia in a full scale, and his

¹³⁹ Tao Zhijian. “Citizens of Whose World? Goldsmith's Orientalism.” *Comparative Literature Studies*: 33, 1996. p.34.

¹⁴⁰ James Watt. “Goldsmith's Cosmopolitanism”. *Eighteenth-Century Life*: 30 (1). pp. 56-75.

cosmopolitanism is only wishful thinking. In other words, Goldsmith's cosmopolitanism is only probable among advanced civilisations. In fact, despite the fact that the text offers a possibility to look into the barbarous country through the account of Hingpo in Persia, the final escapes of Hingpo and Zelis would signify the repudiation of barbarity, thereby qualifying Goldsmith's cosmopolitanism and distinguishing it from mere cultural relativism or pluralism for pluralism's sake.

Even though Goldsmith's concept of cosmopolitanism is only partially realised in the text and is at times eclipsed by his inconsistent attitudes towards China, what Goldsmith contributes to his age is distinctive. He was very much inspired by the preceding European Enlightenment. If we say that in Goldsmith's time, the oriental tales were like those chinoiseries imported from the East and were nothing more than a passing trend, what Goldsmith does with *The Citizen of the World* is to refashion the oriental tales as Enlightenment text. In order to make this work "useful" and relevant to the age, Goldsmith brings in the full range of his humanist concerns. These humanist concerns are demonstrated by a Chinese philosopher whose cultural background is in many ways just as advanced as his own. Goldsmith attempts to borrow from and to instil the illuminating aspects of Chinese philosophy into English society, beneath which we can still see Goldsmith's patriotic nationalism. It is true that Goldsmith may have used the character of Lien Chi to express his opinions as an outsider and an Irish author. And it is also true that Goldsmith's own inconsistency and inconstancy decrease the force of his criticism and the power of his characterisation. Nevertheless, it is equally true that Goldsmith does not intend to make *The Citizen of the World* a work of pure "imposture". Similar to his Enlightenment predecessors and contemporaries, Goldsmith believes China is a despotic and stagnant country, but we should not forget that China at that time also represents to the West as a country of leading with a distinguished tradition of philosophy and rationality very much in tune with the values of the Enlightenment. Although Goldsmith's claim to represent the "authentic" China is dubious and funny, yet we should not ignore the fact that Goldsmith self-consciously intends to mock the popular oriental tales at his time with his pseudo-oriental tale. As a result, without understanding Goldsmith's humanist and Enlightenment concerns, it would be wrong to read *The Citizen of the World* in purely "orientalist" terms. Furthermore, it would also be unfair to view this work as primarily a tool of colonialist

oppression; whatever the effects of Goldsmith's writing in practice, in theory at least he savagely attacked colonialism, and hoped to build a cosmopolitan world culture of "universal virtue", a culture virtuous enough to transcend all narrow economic interests.

Even several decades after *The Citizen of the World* was published, the travel narratives of eastern travellers were still popular. This fact proves that Western readers were still fascinated by the little known East, and the East still remained enticing to the West. However, with the swift growth of industrialisation and commercialism, travel to the East became easier. The more easily the East could be accessed, the more the West saw the cultural stagnation of the East. Thirty years after *The Citizen of the World* was published in London, an embassy from England under King George III's command was sent to China. This embassy was considered a failure in many senses, yet the travelling accounts published by embassy members a few years after their return to England are now regarded as a very crucial factor in helping to change the way the West looked at the East. In the next chapter, we will discover how and why the accounts of the Macartney Embassy differ so markedly from earlier accounts.

On a Slow Boat to China: Macartney Embassy and China Unveiled

Goldsmith's Chinese philosopher might have left England for his further adventure, but what he leaves behind is the general public's enhanced curiosity and interests in this oriental empire. Goldsmith criticises contemporary writers for using China as a mere fictional and fantastical attraction, whereas his idea of China is a re-examination of Enlightenment rationality, and ultimately a mockery of the Sinophilic fad at his time. However, even though Goldsmith attempted to remove the irrational obsession with China in his time, his contemporary Britons were still fascinated by the philosophical ideas of the land. Three decades after *The Citizen of the World*, a royal embassy led by Lord Macartney to China took place, in the hope of opening up the bilateral commercial trade and establishing diplomatic ties between China and England. This journey to China took two years, and in 1794 when the embassy returned to the country, it returned with disappointment: China was nothing like the country as what the Jesuits or the Enlightenment writers had described. This diplomatic failure, however, signified British's first attempt to enter Mainland China, and its influence on the public opinions about China remained crucial, diverse, and extensive. As many of the embassy members published their travel accounts about China after the return, the embassy reshaped the images of China among the Britons. And because of the semi-official quality to these publications and the actual first-hand experiences living in China, the images of China were then transformed from an imaginative land to more of a specific political and geographical entity.

After the return of the embassy, the journey became a very popular topic among the British public. Lord Macartney's valet, Aeneas Anderson, started the fire by publishing his account of China in 1795, and after the public passion for this topic lasted for quite some time. Besides Anderson, many among the ninety-five embassy members published their individual accounts of this journey, such as the secretary George Leonard Staunton, comptroller John Barrow, mechanic James Dinwiddie, draughtsman William Alexander, to name just a few. These publications were in different formats, and were usually followed by several reprints. The incredible popularity was unprecedented, and the public interests in the Cathay were reignited. One brief example that can demonstrate these accounts' popularity is Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, published in 1814.

When Fanny Price's cousin Edmund Bertram walks in and finds Fanny's reading of Lord Macartney's trip to China, he refers it to Fanny's "great book", even though Fanny Price's thoughts about the book or about China are not particularly specified.¹⁴¹ However, whether specified or not, this goes to show that Fanny, as one intelligent young woman, has keen interests in contemporary affairs, which shows the connection between characters in the fiction and the popular taste outside the fiction, as Susan Allen Ford argues, is a central concept to Jane Austen's fictional design.¹⁴² Ford's proposal shows how the embassy still held the unfailing charm in Austen's time, as the general reading public could still very much relate to this event two decades later.

In fact, the topic of Macartney's embassy was not only a big success in the late eighteenth century but also the first half of nineteenth century. As its contemporary common readers were interested in unveiling the enigmatic China, commentators were curious about what might have resulted in this diplomatic failure. One of the reasons that has been most generally accepted for the failure is Lord Macartney's reluctance to perform the ritual of "kowtow"¹⁴³, which shocked and annoyed the Chinese Emperor and officials alike. Nonetheless, modern historians argue that the reasons behind the failure may be far more complex than this specific ritual. In other words, the significance of the embassy was far beyond one-dimensional political concerns, as modern researches install new energy to this topic by introducing new approaches and by provoking new discussions about the legacy of the embassy. Thus, in order to further explore into this topic, it is beneficial to re-examine the preparations of the embassy, the embassy members' accounts, and then the contemporary commentators' responses. And, in so doing, the impact and the importance of this embassy can shine through in regard to how they sustained their influences and reshaped the public view of China in the first half of the

¹⁴¹ Some critics have argued that Austen's use of Macartney Embassy's journey, as the intersection of domestic and global politics, is to demonstrate Fanny's resistance to the despotic power of Aunt Norris. Peter Kitson, however, sees the argument "tantalising, enigmatic and much underdeveloped". See Peter Kitson. "Robert Southey and the Romantic Failure of China". *Wordsworth Circle*: Winter, 2011, Vol. 42 Issue 1, p.81.

¹⁴² Susan Allen Ford. "Fanny's 'Great Book': Macartney's Embassy to China and *Mansfield Park*". *Persuasions On-line*: Vol. 28, No.2. <http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol28no2/ford.htm>. Accessed on June 11th, 2009.

¹⁴³ As the spellings may differ, the words "kowtow", "kotou", "kowtow" and "kotow" refer to the same act of deep respect shown by kneeling and bowing so low as to have one's head touching the ground. The differences of sound were made because various dialects of the Chinese language were spoken at that time. In this chapter, "kowtow" will be used as the most generally accepted spelling.

nineteenth century.

Preparations

Before the embassy took place, most information about China came from Jesuit missionaries, who penned their accounts in their native languages or in Latin. Even though European and British readers were passionate about the topic of China, the majority of the materials they could access was through the accounts by Jesuit missionaries and occasionally some merchants. Especially in Britain, only little first-hand information about China available was in English, and thus the understanding of China in Britain relied heavily on translation. Because an embassy of this nature was unprecedented, the lack of accurate information about China set the first barrier to the preparation for this trip. In *Some Account of the Public Life and a Selection from the Unpublished Writings of the Earl of Macartney*¹⁴⁴, John Barrow, the secretary for Lord Macartney at that time, describes Lord Macartney's fear of failure. In a letter to Mr. Dundas, Barrow notes, Lord Macartney expressed that he had resolved "all the advantages that might result to the public and the disappointments which [he] might meet with [himself]". He felt "the highest anticipated satisfaction" but at the same time "prepared to suffer".¹⁴⁵ As he bore in mind the probability of failure, Lord Macartney's preparations were extensive and careful. As Maxine Berg points out, "Macartney gathered a notably cosmopolitan entourage of 'useful knowledge' from all over Europe."¹⁴⁶ Barrow confirmed in preparations, due to the Chinese "manners and customs...entirely unknown to Englishmen", they sought from "the voluminous writings of the French missionaries" and were informed by these "most intelligent men" the impression of "a very extraordinary taste prevailing at the court of China" for sciences, and particularly "astronomy and experimental philosophy".¹⁴⁷ Barrow, retrospectively, states in his *Travels in China* that "with regard to China [...] we have not yet heard the sentiments of an Englishman at all acquainted with the manners, customs, and character of the Chinese nation. The voluminous communications of the missionaries are by no means

¹⁴⁴ John Barrow. *Some Account of the Public Life, and a Selection from the Unpublished Writings, of the Earl of Macartney*. London: Cadell and Davies, 1807. 2 vols.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, Vol. 2: pp. 344-345.

¹⁴⁶ Maxine Berg. "Britain, industry and perceptions of China: Matthew Boulton, 'useful knowledge', and the Macartney Embassy to China 1792-1794." *Journal of Global History*, 2006: 1, pp. 269-288.

¹⁴⁷ Barrow, 1807. Vol. 2: p. 348.

satisfactory”.¹⁴⁸

As the main sources for the topic of China, the Jesuit missionaries' works were “by no means satisfactory”, it shows that many intellectuals at that time were growing dubious about the highly positive images that the Jesuits projected. Macartney's suspicion could mean that he drew information about China from resources elsewhere. “The Literary Club” founded by Dr. Samuel Johnson in 1763 proves to be a great resource. Starting with nine original members, the Club included some of the most influential and prominent figures in London, and together these members comprised a collective body of knowledge and opinion as they joined force behind one of the most long-lived literary magazines, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, in Georgian England. As Johnson himself pointed out, he wished the Club to be “composed of the heads of every liberal and literary profession” and “have somebody to refer to in our doubts and discussions, by whose Science we might be enlightened”,¹⁴⁹. By the time Lord Macartney was elected as one of the Club members in 1786, the number of the Club members had increased. Apart from Macartney being a very experienced diplomat, the Club members such as William Jones, Adam Smith and Thomas Percy shared the interest in the Orient. For example, William Jones dedicated his research to the study of the relationship of Indo-European languages, and was the founder of the Asiatic Society. In his later years, he even enthusiastically advocated Eastern literature as a new source of images and objects for European poetry. Thomas Percy, later as a bishop, when preparing his compilation of *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* published in 1765, he translated a seventeenth-century Chinese novel *Hau Kiou Chooan*¹⁵⁰ into English in 1761 and then compiled *Miscellaneous Pieces Relating to China* in 1762.¹⁵¹ Adam Smith in his *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nation* placed China as one of the wealthiest countries around the world.¹⁵² Apart from his association with the Club members, Macartney was a friend of Voltaire. Voltaire was known for his strong interest in China, and his ideas about China were particularly influential to

¹⁴⁸ Barrow. *Travels in China*. London: Cadell and Davies, 1804, p. 3.

¹⁴⁹ Marshall Waingrow. Ed. *The Correspondence and other Papers of James Boswell: Relating to the Making of the Life of Johnson*. Heinemann, London, 1969, p. 331.

¹⁵⁰ Thomas Percy. *Hau Kiou Chooan*. London: R. and J. Dodsley in Pall Mall, 1761.

¹⁵¹ Thomas Percy. *Miscellaneous Pieces Relating to China*. 1762.

¹⁵² Adam Smith. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nation*. London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1776

the second half of the eighteenth century, even though the China had started to decline towards the end of the eighteenth century. While Montesquieu might think that Chinese Empire is a despotic country, Voltaire believed China to be a “stagnant” country of “enlightened absolutism”.¹⁵³ Voltaire’s China is by all means a country whose civilisation can be compared to its European counterparts. These different opinions of China altogether formed a fundamental image of mixed reviews shared by European intellectuals and thinkers before Macartney embassy’s trip. Although not every cultural figure was fully convinced by this positive image of China, the general opinions still favoured China. Macartney’s dissatisfaction could only suggest the growing curiosity for more comprehensive and diverse responses to China and could justify the need for an official account of the country.

The immense popularity of the Jesuit missionaries’ works showed a keen interest in the topic of China, but the almost one-dimensional viewpoint failed to form a more complete picture of China, posing a major difficulty for the preparations of the embassy. A far more difficult task awaited was to find adequate and eligible interpreters of Chinese language and manners who could help with the intense work of the embassy. Barrow stated the hardship they encountered and Sir George Staunton set off for Paris then to Naples “where the society *De Propaganda Fide* were known to receive occasionally young Chinese, sent over by the missionaries with a view to their being instructed in the Christian religion, and, at the same time, in the Latin and Italian languages”. Quite fortunately for the embassy, these two young Chinese who had “finished their instruction, and taken the order of the priesthood” “were preparing to return to their own country”. Thus, these two men “readily engaged their services as interpreters to the embassy, and two others, desirous of availing themselves of so favourable an opportunity of getting to China, followed their companions to London, and were accommodated with a passage in the *Hindustan*”.¹⁵⁴ Barrow’s description was rather interesting, since none of the embassy spoke Chinese or had the least knowledge that could be useful in Chinese, they, in a desperate need, found two boys who were sent to Italy for the instruction in Christianity as well as in Latin and Italian, not English. In an embassy of political, diplomatic and economic significances, verbal

¹⁵³ Voltaire. *An Essay On Universal History, the Manners, and Spirits of Nations*. trans. Thomas Nugent. London: J. Nourse, 1759.

¹⁵⁴ Barrow, 1807: Vol. 2:345-346.

communication should be valued above all other conditions. The embassy, however, may have underestimated the importance of this, causing some unforeseen challenges in the journey.

Except for the interpretation issue, another important task was to select proper presents for the Emperor of China. Even though the primary task for the embassy was to establish bilateral diplomatic and commercial ties between England and China, the embassy took advantage of the event of celebrating the Emperor's eighty-third birthday, hoping to please the Emperor as well as the Chinese court. However, these gifts were later mistaken by the Chinese for tributes to the Emperor. This misunderstanding disabled the embassy from making any further diplomatic progress, as the format of "tributary" suggested that England was reconciled to the power of China. As for selecting the presents for the Emperor, the embassy read previous French documents and learnt that many foreign missionaries held offices as astronomers in the Chinese court. As a result of that, "it was natural therefore that Lord Macartney should provide, among other presents, some valuable instruments of different kinds, and of the latest improvements".¹⁵⁵ Following the old paths of these foreign missionaries, Macartney felt the need to demonstrate things that would attract the Emperor's interests. And as an ambassador, it was also necessary for Macartney to demonstrate the best of British advancement. In this case, the gifts carried significance that was much larger than their price-values. Whether it was to present to China the astronomical discoveries, or to show off the scientific as well technological improvements, the presents were to enhance Chinamen's comprehension of the British. Apart from these items, the gift list also consisted of guns, rifles, pistols, and some weapons. Weapons of all sorts were to display the latest industrialisation in England, and more indirectly, to pose some military intimidation to China. In other words, this selection of gifts was to demonstrate to this oriental empire, in Barrow's words, not only the "stunning display of Western genius",¹⁵⁶ but also the true capability of British forces.

From a modern point of view, the preparations for this embassy to China seemed rushed and appeared somewhat dicey. Both countries lacked fundamental knowledge about each other. For British side, they thought

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 348.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 348.

the European standard would have been universally adopted, yet it appeared to be their wishful thinking. On Chinese side, the geographical myth about its own location at the centre of the world appeared ignorant and arrogant. The mutual ignorance preluded an inevitable clash between two cultures, heading to the bitter fruit of a diplomatic failure. The Chinese empire refused to be understood and opened up. The mounting frustration that the embassy members received in the negotiation process with the Chinese was later transformed into negative sentiments towards China. The numerous publications published by embassy members thus influenced the general public's views about China. These impacts were so strong that even some decades later, they still lingered in the British minds and made several crucial turning points in world history.

Trading Places

For the first British diplomatic journey to China, the preparations of the Macartney embassy seemed insufficient and rushed. In terms of materials, the embassy tried its best to collect and to present to the Chinese Emperor the most advanced inventions in Europe. However, as both countries claimed its superiority over each other, there was a fundamental conflict between England and China, the self-centred viewpoint, which is understandable, due to the geographical distance that separates these two countries. As a result of this, the clash was inevitable. The self-reflective ideology was ubiquitous during the process of diplomatic negotiation. One of the best examples can be seen in the appeal by King George III and the edict by Qian-long, two rulers of “the most powerful nation of the globe” and “the only civilisation under heaven”¹⁵⁷. These were not only used for diplomatic negotiation but also for the display of the nation's strength.

In George III's “appeal” to the Emperor Qian-long¹⁵⁸, the King employs a tone of mutual respect, a common etiquette in Europe at his time. In his letter, he states his intention to remain at peace with China, and, if under certain conditions, his willingness to establish commercial as well as diplomatic ties with China. The King starts his appeal by praising the vast

¹⁵⁷ These two titles were used in King George III's letter to the Emperor, and in the Emperor's Edict to the King. See *Imperial China*. Eds. F. Schumann & O. Schell. New York: Vintage Books, 1967, pp. 5-113.

¹⁵⁸ The spellings of Emperor Qian-long's name vary. The spellings such as Kien-long, Ki'an long, Chien-lung were all used in previous literature, based on the wide variety of Chinese dialects, pronunciations, and spelling systems. In this dissertation, the modern spelling is adopted to facilitate contemporary researchers' comprehension and use.

calibre of Chinese civilisation and, in order not to cause confusion or concern, he defines this embassy not as a “purpose of conquest” but as a “quest for knowledge” in the geographical parts “where they were hitherto little known” with the help of “the most wise and learned of our own people.” He explicitly claims that

We have been still more anxious to enquire into the arts and manners of countries where civilization has been perfected by the wise ordinances and virtuous examples of their sovereigns thro a long series of ages; and above all our ardent wish has been to become acquainted with those celebrated institutions of your Majesty’s populous and extensive empire, which have carried its prosperity to such a height as to be the admiration of all surrounding nations.

This appeal by King George III corresponds well to the intellectual concerns from the earlier time to the contemporary era. It is not difficult to see the heavy European influence on the ideas of China at this stage. For example, Montesquieu’s, Voltaire’s or even Du Halde’s descriptions of China still held in contemporary European intellectual minds a strong presence. Despite the quest for knowledge as the stated purpose, the proposal of mutual benefit creeps in, implying the interests in Chinese materials. The interests extend beyond not merely the aspects of culture but also diplomacy and commerce. The King conjectures that between “civilised nations as China and Great Britain”, it is necessary to have “the resident of a proper person authorised by us” to avoid any misunderstanding and inconvenience. Under the umbrella of mutual benefits, the King recommends that Macartney, as an ambassador, should be in full charge of all English affairs in China, and should “have the opportunity of contemplating the examples of your virtues and to obtain such information of your celebrated institutions, as will enable him to enlighten our people on his return”. In this case, the King further suggests that his counterpart might “be pleased to allow to any of our subjects frequenting the coasts of your dominions, and conducting themselves with propriety, a secure residence there, and a fair access to your markets, under such laws and regulations as your Majesty shall think right, and that their lives and properties shall be safe under your imperial protection”. And in return, the King offers “a full and free communication of any art science or observation either of use or curiosity which the industry, ingenuity and experience of Europeans may have enabled them to acquire”,

if the Chinese Emperor “shall please to desire it”. The king’s appeal thus demonstrates amenity and amicability to the emperor. And at the same time, it is to reiterate the European advancement in arts and science, a reaffirmation of European superiority over China.

The King’s request for establishing formal diplomatic ties between these two countries of “brotherly affection” was however denied by the Chinese Emperor. The direct reason behind this refusal was Chinese exclusive self-pride accompanied by its ignorance. As China regarded itself as “the only civilisation under heaven”, the material offerings from Macartney Embassy were mistaken for a gesture to show Britain’s “devotion and loyalty” to China. To the Emperor, George III was merely a king of a foreign barbarous tribe. Thus, George III’s requests were understandably mistaken for an inappropriate ambition to break Chinese traditions, which posed a threat to the existent political system and stability of Chinese society, for the fear that other neighbouring countries who paid tributary to the Emperor would follow. Apart from this, Qing Dynasty avoided provoking any possible change to its reign of China. The Emperor suggests in a gentle tone that he does not wish to force foreign envoys, if there were to be any, to adopt the dress and customs of China because

Europe consists of many other nations besides your own: if each and all demanded to be represented at our Court, how could we possibly consent? The thing is utterly impracticable. How can our dynasty alter its whole procedure and system of etiquette, established for more than a century, in order to meet your individual views? If it be said that your object is to exercise control over your country’s trade, your nationals have had full liberty to trade at Canton for many a year, and have received the greatest consideration at our hands. Missions have been sent by Portugal and Italy, preferring similar requests. The Throne appreciated their sincerity and loaded them with favours, besides authorising measures to facilitate their trade with China. [...] Why then should foreign nations advance this utterly unreasonable request to be represented at my Court? Peking is nearly two thousand miles from Canton, and at such a distance what possible control could any British representative exercise?

The Emperor declines the possibility of a foreign representative at his court, and the possible ambitions European countries might have in terms

of foreign affairs in China. These “utterly unreasonable” requests were thus denied. Other requests were not received or responded well either.

If you assert that your reverence for Our Celestial dynasty fills you with a desire to acquire our civilization, our ceremonies and code of laws differ so completely from your own that, even if your Envoy were able to acquire the rudiments of our civilization, you could not possibly transplant our manners and customs to your alien soil. Therefore, however adept the Envoy might become, nothing would be gained thereby.

Swaying the wide world, I have but one aim in view, namely, to maintain a perfect governance and to fulfil the duties of the State: strange and costly objects do not interest me. If I have commanded that the tribute offerings sent by you, O King, are to be accepted, this was solely in consideration for the spirit which prompted you to dispatch them from afar.

To the Chinese Emperor, Britain is merely a barbarous country, on whose “alien soil” Chinese manners and customs can never be transplanted. The embassy members are considered barbarians (*Yi*), and are far beyond where Chinese civilisation could reach. This sense of superiority naturally makes the Chinese Emperor mistake the presents as tributes. Whether presents or tributes, the Emperor emphasises his lack of interest in the offerings with the only exception that they are dispatched from afar. Accordingly, the difference between these two countries’ acquisitions is obvious: while Britain clearly has a better understanding of China and treats China as a country of reasoning and etiquette, China regards Britain as an uncivilised country shielded oceans away that pays tribute to China to show its loyalty and devotion in order to gain protection from China. The arrogance demonstrated in the Emperor’s response is decisive in determining how the Macartney embassy was received in China, and consequently it constituted the British public’s views about China.

In his *The Collision of Two Civilisations*¹⁵⁹, Alain Peyrefitte calls on the attention to the British offerings to the Emperor. For the embassy, these offerings are gifts to please the Emperor with an implication of the

¹⁵⁹ Alain Peyrefitte. *The Collision of Two Civilisations: The British Expedition to China in 1792–4*. Trans. Jon Rothschild. London: Harvill, 1993.

achievement in European civilisation; however and unfortunately, these gifts are mistaken for the tributes on the special occasion of the Emperor's birthday on the Chinese side. The major difference between "gifts" and "tributes" is evident: for "gifts", it suggests the equal status between the two, while "tributes" carries a connotation of China's supremacy over England. Peyrefitte further explores the problem of gifts/tributes "was not rooted in mere superficial touchiness". He argues:

Deep convictions were at issue—respect for cosmic order on one side, sense of honour on the other. The disagreement was not due, as the British imagined, to misguided interference by junior officials; nor, as the Chinese believed, was it a matter of barbarian ignorance. For the British, it was the refusal of a people who felt borne by the wings of history to humble themselves; for the Chinese, it was the defence of the rituals, long ago established once and for all, that lay at the very foundation of civilisation itself. The impasse of protocol masked a confrontation of two different worlds.¹⁶⁰

With the complex and different mindsets of the two countries, the collision is inevitable. For both countries, the embassy would signify an opportunity for reciprocal communication, but the lack of mutual understanding led to collisions from trifles as trivial as table manners to issues so great as national pride. While Macartney decided to view the issue as a mere lexical inaccuracy, his gesture suggested a compromise to not only Chinese etiquette and bureaucracy system but also to Chinese national and cultural pride. This, however, was a reconfirmation to the Chinese court that the British embassy was acknowledging its own inferiority and submission to the Celestial Court.

Apart from the issue of tribute, the other problem that has provoked a lot of debates is the dispute about kowtow. The problem can be divided into several layers. First of all, according to Lord Macartney and other embassy members' accounts, the ambassador did not perform the ceremony of kowtow to the Emperor. But in Chinese official accounts, it was clear that the ambassador did take the suggestion from the Chinese officials and performed the ritual. The complete opposite accounts of the same event suggest the Chinese officials' tendency to claim its superiority to England, while the Britons' reluctance to submit to the dictated ritual

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.89.

performance. From its contemporary commentators to modern historians have been endeavouring to investigate the dialectics of this particular historical mystery. Many historians have exhausted historical materials. Among numerous studies, Earl H. Pritchard's article "The Kotow in the Macartney Embassy to China in 1793"¹⁶¹ is in an attempt to restore the historical facts behind this incident. Prichard's article tries to examine from different angles, and reaches the conclusion that Lord Macartney did not perform the ceremony; instead, he chose to kneel down on one knee. The envoy's decision, as result, was not popular among the Chinese. Pritchard notes that

He [Lord Macartney] did not object to being called a tribute-bearer, but he would not kotow without a quid pro quo. He insisted that there must be something in the whole process which would, to his own satisfaction, distinguish him from an ordinary tribute-bearer. This position was essentially illogical even from the Western point of view and totally so from the Chinese. To refuse to kotow after having conformed to all other parts of the suzerain-vassal relationship was in reality pointless, and grew out of a profound misunderstanding of the meaning of the act itself and out of the European's belief, that, although the Chinese view of an ambassador as a tribute-bearer could not commit a European sovereign not only could so commit him but would actually be as if the King himself were grovelling before the Emperor.¹⁶²

Prichard's observation specially addresses the contradictions in the ritual between two countries. The concerns for both sides vary drastically. For the English side, as the ambassador represents the sovereign, the kowtow would signify the ultimate submission and the degradation of the national pride. However, for the Chinese part, in order to remain its equal generosity and grace to every submissive country, Macartney's requests were beyond normal. Pritchard concludes candidly that:

The immediate difficulty over the kotow lay in the Westerner's psychology, in his lack of knowledge of its true significance, and in his own doctrine that the ambassador's acts were acts of his

¹⁶¹ Earl H. Pritchard. "The Kotow in the Macartney Embassy to China in 1793." *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1943, pp. 163-203.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, pp. 198-199.

sovereign. If the kotow demeaned and degraded the Ambassador and his sovereign, it was only because they thought so, not because the Chinese did. If the kotow signalled vassalage, it was only because the Westerner believed this to be true, not because the Chinese so considered it. To the Chinese the sending of a mission with presents was the important act in vassalage and submission, and if Westerners wished to avoid this they could do so only by refraining from sending embassies.¹⁶³

Since both countries believed that their world views were universal, it is not unimaginable that starting with false presumptions, followed by misconceptions and confusions, the historical encounter was destined for frustrations. It is also inevitable that the misinterpretation of the ritual should serve as the prelude to the greater clash to come in the next century.

James L. Hevia in his book *Cherishing Men From Afar*¹⁶⁴ addresses the problem of ritual and ceremony in this embassy. Like Pritchard and Peyrefitte, Hevia manages to explore both Chinese and English materials, trying to restore the historical facts. Instead of the approach of comprehensive studies, Hevia specifies that the ritual was the most crucial factor that helped the Chinese Emperor and his officials with assessing the British forces and attitudes, and that this embassy was one encounter “between two expansive empires, each with its own definition of its concerns and its own security requirements”.¹⁶⁵ Hevia further suggests that the ceremony of kowtow symbolises an abstract idea of cosmic order, which was not fully comprehended by the British embassy. As Hevia proposes

In this formulation [of the Qing court], the bodily movements of Macartney or any other European diplomat before the emperor could not be read as a signifying practice that in itself was constitutive of contingent and continuing relationships. It could only represent or express, at the moment of exchange, the transcendent truth of the internal unity of British and Chinese sovereignty, the symbolic recognition of which was the task of “ceremony”. Only after this task

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 199.

¹⁶⁴ James L. Hevia. *Cherishing Men From Afar*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 223.

was completed could the “business” of the embassy proceed.¹⁶⁶

The lack of understanding this abstract cosmo-political idea was a fatal blow to the mission, since “the [Chinese court’s] overwhelming emphasis in ritual texts on the position and disposition of bodies in ceremonial space meant that ritual actions constituted a cosmo-political order in highly consequential ways”.¹⁶⁷ To the British embassy, the diplomatic goals were their primary concerns. In that case, to perform the ritual in the ceremony became a pressure on the embassy to surrender to the unreasonable demands by the Chinese officials, even though the Chinese did allow the ambassador to adopt his own way of paying respect to the Emperor by kneeling only on one knee.

The ritual of kowtow was tellingly more than a physical posture to both sides. As Lord Macartney believed that this alteration of ritual could have signalled a transition from the ritual itself to the diplomatic mission, Macartney’s account reconfirmed “certain presuppositions Macartney brought to China”. Hevia argues:

Asians love pomp; the Chinese judge people on the basis of “external appearance”; the emperor’s rule is absolutist and despotic in nature. Second, his “success” regarding the altered form of his audience with the emperor convinced him, in turn, that much of the ritual he saw was mere spectacle for the consumption of the unenlightened, and that China’s so-called “immutable laws” would dissolve when met with firmness.¹⁶⁸

The firm stance, as Lord Macartney was strongly convinced, could cut and reshape the over-complex Chinese ritual texts, and maybe some rules too. Macartney used this embassy as a touchstone, and thought that even if his embassy should fail, the next embassy to come would be able to succeed should they insist upon a firm stance in the presence of China. This insistence influenced and dominated the British attitude towards China in terms of Anglo-Chinese relation in the next century, especially when the topic entered the public sphere and grew even more popular. And, with the popularity of the topic swiftly pervading, the embassy members’ accounts collectively formed a clearer picture of this embassy for the general

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 222

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 223

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 222

audience. Among them, the embassy's draughtsman William Alexander, along with his contemporary the caricaturist James Gillray, provided the contemporary British public with very specific images of China.

Picture Imperfect

Twelve days before the embassy set out on September 14th, 1792, James Gillray, a famous caricaturist, published a caricature with the title "Reception of the Diplomatie and his Suite at the Court of Pekin"¹⁶⁹. This image by Gillray features an imaginary scene, in which the ambassador Lord Macartney hands a letter from the British King to the Chinese Emperor. This image can be roughly divided into two halves. On the left-hand side, the Chinese Emperor is portrayed in a cartoon-like way as a lazy and over-weight figure with an arrogant attitude on his face. He is lying on a gigantic mat, holding a pipe with one of his long-nailed hands. Behind the emperor, two senior Chinese officials are sitting higher than the Emperor's seat, and one general with sword stands aside as the emperor's bodyguard. A young servant is attending at the Emperor's side, with a curious look upon these foreign visitors. The caricature depicts the complicated yet brilliant patterns on the clothes and the architecture. Except for the young servant's facial expression, all the Chinese figures' looks are rather reserved, indifferent and serious to the British embassy members. On the right-hand side, the ambassador himself is kneeling down on one knee, while two other figures behind the ambassador actually kowtow to the Emperor. Some other embassy members are standing right beside the ambassador, holding objects that represent advanced British and European civilisation. The British embassy members' looks are somewhat unsure, curious and seemingly interested in learning about Chinese people's responses.

¹⁶⁹ James Gillray. "Reception of the Diplomatie and His Suite in the Court of Pekin." Published by Hannah Humphrey hand-coloured etching. Published 14th September, 1792. National Portrait Gallery, London. Also, the spellings of "Pekin" and "Peking" were both used in the past literature, and are both used in this chapter to refer to Beijing, the capital of China.



This caricature by James Gillray is particularly interesting and significant, for it demonstrates British people's general idea of China before the embassy made the trip, even though the image was full of erroneous depictions. For example, it was impossible for the Chinese Emperor to sit on the floor with his officials sitting vertically higher than him. The Chinese Emperor at that time was Emperor Qian-Long, who was famous for his thin and tall figure, which was consequently contradictory to the caricaturist's portrayal. Also, it was quite impossible for the Emperor to receive his guests in a very lazy manner, which would have been considered rude. The pipe in the Emperor's hands is also worth caution, because it showed that the Chinese figures were at that time often associated with opium-smoking. The Emperor holding a pipe in his hand would also have been viewed very inappropriate and disrespectful to the ultimate cosmic order and hierarchy that he represented. The Emperor also had the responsibility to act decently in the court, in order to demonstrate to his officials that he was the leader of the country. Although it is not clear what sources Gillray may have turned to before he produced this work, the errors rightly summed up the popular fallacies about China among British audiences. And coincidentally, the image seemed to prophesy the actual situation that would later occur in China. First of all,

the Chinese were mean-looking, serious, emotionless, and nearly indifferent to the British embassy. Secondly, the ambassador did not surrender to Chinese etiquette, and decided to pay his respect to the Emperor in the British manner. Thirdly, the image also showed that to British perceptions, China was all about its past glory and great achievement in architecture, while Britain represented scientific and technological advancements. Nevertheless, these architectural decorations and the Chinese's blank looks faded into the background, leaving the emphasis on the British embassy members' movements and reactions. In other words, the British half of the image seemed dynamic and alert, while the Chinese one seemed immobile and dead. This intentional difference between the two halves of the image thus became crucial in the discussion about the representation of China. But according to many retakes on this theme, it showed Gillray's satirical work occupied the centre of discussions. His portrayals of the Chinese Emperor and Chinese officials were widely imitated by many of his contemporary or later painters. For example, George Cruikshank's image "The Court at Brighton à la Chinese!"¹⁷⁰ shows some resemblances to Gillray's work as he satirised King George IV's passion for chinoiserie.



¹⁷⁰ George Cruikshank. "The Court at Brighton à la Chinese!!" Published by J. Sidebotham in 1816. Hand-coloured etching. British Museum, London.

There is no denying that Gillray's comic and satirical image was popular, and it carries an even more crucial significance on the occasion of this historic Sino-Anglo encounter. Although Gillray himself was absent from this occasion, his work marked the British public curiosity about and interest in China still remained strong, but, at the same time, it also suggests that the British sentiment had by then moved away from the Enlightenment portrayal of China to a new phase, a phase where everything about China needed to be re-examined and re-evaluated. Although it is not certain whether Lord Macartney had the chance to actually see this cartoon by Gillray right before the trip, it shows that the potential to still excite the public to expect the unexpected about this trip, and also it delivers an alerting message that the Anglo-Chinese relations might not stand as good as the Briton's wishful thinking.

Gillray's caricature proves that, although pseudo-oriental tales were greatly circulated in the eighteenth-century England, images about the Orient or the oriental people were generally lacking and inaccurate. Take China for example. It was not until the return of the embassy could the British public have more accurate accounts and images about China and Chinese people done by Britons, not by Jesuit missionaries or merchants. And among the image-makers, William Alexander is undoubtedly the most important figure at this stage. As an appointed draughtsman in the embassy, William Alexander produced more than one thousand sketches and paintings in China, which, consequently, presented to the British public a very comprehensive and exhaustive series of images about China. The topics of Alexander's images varied, covering from the daily utensils to pets, from everyday clothes to costumes for special occasions, from architecture to natural landscape. These images created by Alexander are significantly meaningful, because altogether they presented to the contemporary writers the authentic portrayal of the land and thus broke down the fictional perceptions towards China, whether they were Sinophiles' over-enthusiasm or the sceptics' underestimation. These images provided the British audience with a very tangible way to perceive and receive this peculiar land. In other words, William Alexander gave the British public (and later, Europeans too) a reality check: China is a geographical and political entity, rather than an imaginary nation of novelty.

These images created by William Alexander, along with other embassy

members' verbal accounts, were considered as journalistic reports at that time, and William Alexander was taken as one of the earliest image reporters in his time. Used as the illustrations or title images in other embassy members' accounts, Alexander's sketches and paintings too changed the way readers received the accounts. In most cases, Alexander's sketches were used to illustrate specific scenes in the verbal accounts. Readers would thus be doubly impressed with China through the images and words. Readers could also, during the reading process, come back and study the images over and over again. In this way of juxtaposition, images played an equally important role as words. The images could advertise the words, while the words could strengthen the power of images. Like modern day newspapers, the showing of images can sometimes have more impacts than words.¹⁷¹

Although William Alexander was not the main painter in the embassy, yet as a draughtsman, he produced more works than the main painter, Thomas Hickey. After the return of the embassy, the name of William Alexander became greatly known as his illustrations were used in George Staunton's book, *An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China*¹⁷², in 1797. Later, in 1804, Alexander's paintings were again used in John Barrow's book. As these images aroused the reading public's interest, Alexander himself published these images separately in twelve books from 1797 to 1804. And in 1805, these twelve books were compiled into one book under the title *The Costume of China*¹⁷³, which includes forty-eight engravings. The book was very popular and went through several editions later. Besides, Alexander's images of China became especially influential not only because they were popular among the common reading public, but also because they served the purposes for both the East India Company and the Royal Academy of Arts. For both institutions, Alexander's skilful works of art and his detailed portrait of China helped introduce the topic which cannot be easily accessed in the past. To be more specific, Alexander's paintings were beneficial to the East India Company because they presented an authentic picture about China, which might help the company to make more appropriate decisions in terms of trade and commerce. Alexander's

¹⁷¹ For more about the relations between texts and images, please see W. J. T. Mitchell's *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986.

¹⁷² George Staunton. *An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China*. London: G. Nicol, 1797.

¹⁷³ William Alexander. *The Costume of China*. London: William Miller, 1805.

works on the topic of China were introduced to Western aesthetics, and his works were imitated by some later artists such as Thomas Allom and George Newenham Wright.¹⁷⁴

Just like Gillray, William Alexander produced a piece of work that dealt with the occasion where the Emperor of China received the embassy. As the theme was similar, the depictions were rather different. In this painting titled “Ch’ien-lung presenting a Purse to George Thomas Staunton inside the Imperial Tent at Jehol”¹⁷⁵, Alexander portrayed the scene where, after gift-exchanging between two countries, the Chinese Emperor’s granting of a personal purse to the page boy in the British Embassy, George Thomas Staunton. As Susan Legouix addresses it as “perhaps the most human moment in the long ceremony at Jehol”¹⁷⁶, the structure of the art work presents a central focus on the Chinese Emperor in his eighties contrasted with the little British boy aged twelve. This is an occasion when the Emperor enquired if anyone in the embassy could speak Mandarin, and the young lad Thomas Staunton was asked to be brought to the Emperor as he was one among the few in the embassy who had basic knowledge of the Chinese language. Although young Staunton’s Chinese language level was pretty basic at that time, his smartness and quick wit obviously pleased the Emperor. Much to his delight, the Emperor decided to present his own personal purse to the boy, and this, in Lord Macartney’s words, “was deemed a mark of personal favour”.¹⁷⁷ Alexander’s painting showed that the Emperor’s facial expression much more soft and relaxed, and his body slightly leaning forward to express his kindness to the boy. Also, it is not difficult to observe that the Chinese officials were extremely surprised by the Emperor’s deed and were having a heated debate among themselves. In addition, young Staunton chose to kneel down one knee and reached out his right hand to receive the gift from the Emperor, which might have suggested that the British Embassy did not kowtow to the Chinese Emperor. Rather, they chose to adopt Western rituals to show their respects to the Emperor.

¹⁷⁴ Thomas Allom and George Newenham Wright. *China: In a Series of Views, Displaying the Scenery, Architecture, and Social Habits, of That Ancient Empire*. London: Fisher, 1843. This book, as its title suggests, displays a wide range of scenes in China, and many of the images are influenced by Alexander. For example, “Theatre at Tien Sin” and “The Western Gate of Peking” both bear a great resemblance to Alexander’s images.

¹⁷⁵ William Alexander. “Ch’ien-lung presenting a Purse to George Thomas Staunton inside the Imperial Tent at Jehol.” 1804. British Museum, London.

¹⁷⁶ Susan Legouix. *Images of China: William Alexander*. Brighton: Jupiter Books, 1980.

¹⁷⁷ Staunton. *An Authentic Account*. Vol 3: p. 41.



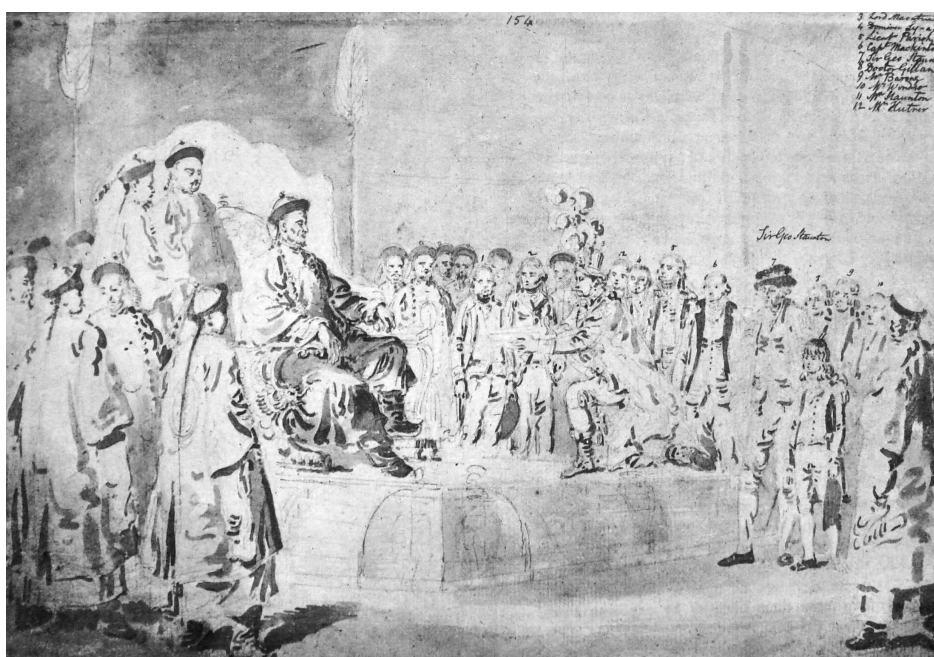
Although Alexander managed to present this historical moment vividly, he was in fact not present at the occasion. He was ordered by Lord Macartney to remain in Peking with Thomas Hickey and some other embassy members to supervise the unpacking and arranging of the gifts. It was never clear why Lord Macartney decided not to bring along the painter and the draughtsman. As the embassy members made it to Jehol, Alexander along with other remaining embassy members were confined to a house surrounded by tall walls and were not allowed visiting the city freely. Much to his annoyance and disappointment, Alexander wrote in his journal:

To have been within 50 miles of that stupendous monument of human labour, the famous Great Wall, and not to have seen that which might have been the boast of a man's grandson, as Dr. Johnson has said, I have to regret forever. That the artists should be doomed to remain immured at Peking during the most interesting journey is not easily to be accounted for.¹⁷⁸

Even though Alexander never went to Jehol and missed this historical moment, he reconstructed it through the account of the eyewitnesses in the

¹⁷⁸ William Alexander. *A Journal of the Lord Macartney's Embassy to China, 1791-1794, Journey of a Voyage to Peking ... in the Hindostan E. I. M. Accompanying Lord Macartney*. London: British Library.

embassy and the drawings by Lieutenant Henry William Parish. Despite the fact that Lieutenant Parish's drawings were quite uninspiring, Alexander managed to bring the scene to life. The cordial atmosphere was captured, and, for a very short moment, showed the diplomatic tension temporarily relaxed for both parties. Interestingly, one of Alexander's watercolour sketches portrayed a moment probably prior to this harmony while the Ambassador was presenting the King's official letter to the Emperor. However, this image was never as famous as the aforementioned one. In terms of diplomatic or commercial significance, the one that dealt with the reception of the King's letter should have deserved more attention than the momentary harmony that occurred only once in the ceremony (and probably in the whole embassy's journey in China). As these two very images shared a high percentage of similarity in image-compositions, the atmosphere in these two images are rather different. While one image shows a kind, friendly, and relaxing atmosphere in the court, the other shows a more serious intensity between the Emperor and the British Embassy. The intensity is still more strengthened by the vast blank in the image and by the upright body-gesture of nearly every figure in the image. In addition, it is not difficult to tell that the image of the reception of the Emperor's purse by Thomas George Staunton was more elaborate in relation to the other one, in which it appeared only an initial stage of watercolour sketch¹⁷⁹.



¹⁷⁹ William Alexander. "Chien-Lung's Court". Watercolour sketches. 1792. British Library, London.

In both images, the plain and straightforward perspective suggested that the painter took a distant stance and tried to present the image in a distanced way. Since the painter was absent from both scenes and had to rely heavily on other embassy members' words-of-mouth and sketches to compose his visual records, both images lacked the painter's emotional connections with what he painted. In both cases, the painter took a comprehensive and omniscient perspective while making the images, which showed no personal involvement in the scenes. One cannot help but wonder: was the painter's absence that made him to take such a unique stance? Was this a conscious decision? Or were there some other reasons that led Alexander to choose such a perspective? More importantly, if Alexander was not present and had to fill in his absence with imagination, can these images fairly portray the reality with this image?

To answer and clarify these questions, it is significant to analyse the paintings and sketches that Alexander made in China. It is not difficult to observe that Alexander had a clear intention not to make any judgement on his images. In order to fairly present to his English audience the land and the people of China, he had to assume a distanced stance toward the images he was making. This detachment was particularly crucial to him for one obvious reason: he was responsible to the East India Company and the British Government for the most accurate information and things that can be of their best interests. Alexander had to make images from a bystander's point of view to serve the authorities' best interests. With this task in mind, he would have to stay as impartial as possible for the sake of future diplomatic and commercial ties between England and China. At the same time, however, Alexander was aware of the fact that he was also making images for the general public. In order to soften the solemn atmosphere and lift the public spirits and to save face for this embassy, he would have to lighten up the overall atmosphere with his images. In so doing, he would mitigate any blame the embassy might suffer. Only in this way can it be explained why Alexander elaborated on one image over the other. Here, as this image shows human interest, and suggests the Chinese civility without excessive ceremony, it is easier to understand why the painter chose to work more on the image that shared the pleasant atmosphere for both countries, rather than to the long and awkward ceremony where the British Embassy felt humiliated by the Chinese officials and the Emperor. Just as Lord Macartney did not fully reckon the embassy as a total failure, Alexander might also have received the

suggestions by the Ambassador to show this unique point of view in the images he did with the attempt to please the British audience.

Apart from the pleasant atmosphere recreated, the “detached” perspective was demonstrated not only in these two images but also in other images that Alexander made in China. Throughout the series of images that Alexander made in China, many of them were stills of everyday objects, plants and animals that he studied, or simply the ordinary scenery he saw. In these images he played down any personal emotion as if he were merely keeping a visual record of things. However, there were also some images in Alexander’s collection that showed peculiar scenes in China that were portrayed in a detached way. For example, these special occasions such as the execution of a prostitute, the religious worship in the temple, or theatrical performance on stage, were treated as materials of absolutely no interest to the painter. What Alexander did in these images was to capture a seized moment, rather than to show the dynamics in China or display his personal emotions. For example, in “The Execution of a Prostitute”, Alexander shows an almost awkward serenity in the image, rather than some exaggerations. The woman in the image is not crying out loud, with a pretty calm facial expression on the face. And the officials who are about to execute her do not have slightest sympathy for the woman, nor do they show any sense of cruelty. The painter minimises the tension and drama that could have been the central focus of the image by using a technique that is very close to natural historian paintings: it is only a catalogue of things and people, a very empirical recording of Chinese non-court life.

There were several images that could also illustrate this argument. Several images captured the moments when several different groups of Chinese countrymen were staring at the British Embassy—or at least the painter himself—as they passed by. In these images, the country folks cannot help but to show their curiosity about these foreign visitors, which again presented the fact that the inland Chinese at that time found it rare to see Westerners because of the lockdown policy by the government. Apart from this fact, we find it rather interesting that neither the painter nor any embassy member was present in the pictures. This “absence” perspective was particularly intriguing because it gave an illusion that there was a direct reciprocal communication between the perceived (the Chinese folks) and the receiver (the British audience). As the objects of the images, these

Chinese were stared at by the painter, by the embassy, and also by the British spectator. In the meanwhile, the curious sights from these Chinese people went beyond the painting frames and pierced right into the British audience. It is obvious that the painter shied away from the topic he was painting and cancelled his own presence in the painting. In so doing, the painter, as the intermediary between two worlds, was invisible.

Alexander's sense of impartiality is very close to modern-day journalism where journalists are supposed to maintain an independence from the stories they cover. As a result, in addition to the descriptive materials and comments from the literary accounts by other embassy members, Alexander's works of art are similar to modern-day photographs. And just like modern-day journalism, however he attempts to remain neutral, simultaneously he is very aware that the materials he covers can excite and stimulate his audience. His focuses on the ordinary, mundane life of Chinese society capture fleeting moments that could evoke the curiosity among the spectacle. From here, we need to raise the question: did Alexander succeed in trying to stay as impartial or neutral as he intended? Or is it simply a failed attempt to remain such stance?

Roland Barthes in his book *Camera Lucida* (1981) illuminates that the nature of modern photography, which, in his view, is "essentially only contingency, singularity, and risk"¹⁸⁰, and thus "unclassifiable"¹⁸¹. Paintings, quite on the contrary, are not contingent, since paintings itself involves the process of selecting topics and locations (the *gazed*, the observed) by the painter (the *gazer*, the observer). In other words, the paintings adhere to the painter, because of the painter's conscious decisions about what he desires to paint. In this case, the painter's intensions can never be overlooked. However the painter wishes to distance himself from the images he creates, it is impossible for the painter to pretend to be impartial in the process of image-making. Thus, paintings are—and can only be—representations that mimic the reality. Apart from this, we should also bear in mind that Alexander's paintings were responsible to the authority and were greatly put to official use. In spite of the authorial interests in these visual records *per se*, these images were to report China, a land that was long admired and desired by the West.

¹⁸⁰ Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981, p.20

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, p.6.

This fad for chinoiserie, as pointed out in the previous chapter, was a long-lasting trend throughout the long eighteenth century, especially in the visual and material aspects. Legouix comments:

During the period of 1730-60 in particular, the British gentry had been busily decorating their gardens with Chinese pavilions and bridges, installing lacquered furniture and fittings and generally indulging in every kind of chinoiserie [...]. Although the call for chinoiserie was waning by the end of the century, it remained a positive feature of British taste into the nineteenth century and so any first-hand study of Chinese life was bound to be viewed with considerable curiosity and interest by the educated public. Alexander must have realised that he would have every chance of capitalising on his experiences on his return home. In the event he spent at least seven years reworking his China sketches to produce a large body of finished watercolours and printed illustrations.¹⁸²

Legouix's words shed some light on our understanding about this nature of Alexander's works. First, China was firstly introduced as a visual object. From chinaware to Chinese-influenced landscape, the word "china" was not only referred to as a nation, but more oftentimes as a desired object that can be visually appreciated. Second, the trend of Sinophilia was popular among "the gentry" and "the educated people", suggesting that the knowledge and appreciation of this trend were much more enjoyed and shared by people from middle and upper class who could afford it. Thirdly, as the paintings are one medium that allow "reworking", the painter can always add his imagination onto the reality. In this sense, even though modern critic J. L. Cranmer-Byng notifies in Alexander's brief biography that "[t]o much extent these finished works are an exercise of the imagination rather than absolutely faithful eyewitness records"¹⁸³, readers in the past had the tendency to treat these works as pure facts. In other words, as the popularity of these works grew, these images were drifting away from the "authentic" or "factual" that people thought of, and were one step further from the impartial stance that the painter intended to take. In the case of Alexanders' China collection, the landscape paintings take up a great portion, which definitely serves as his forte. Perhaps this is the

¹⁸² Legouix. *Images of China*, p. 2.

¹⁸³ George Macartney. Ed. Cranmer-Byng, J.L. *An Embassy to China: Being the Journal Kept By Lord Macartney During His Embassy to the Emperor Ch'ien-Lung 1793-1794*. London: Folio Society, 2004.

genre of paintings that he felt most comfortable with as he was able to thoroughly conceal himself. Like his contemporary artists, Alexander might have been aware of and might have familiarised himself with some Chinese aesthetics presented on material objects such as chinoiserie. Besides, during his short stay in China, Alexander paid some “informal calls on two [Chinese] local artists Puqua and Chamfou.”¹⁸⁴ It is not clear if Alexander borrowed certain concepts from these local Chinese painters, but he might have subtly associated and merged the skills of Chinese water-inked paintings with Western watercolour techniques.

As a painter, Alexander’s strength and interest in landscape paintings well correspond to this artistic trend in the eighteenth century while the watercolour landscape paintings became the English speciality. W. J. T. Mitchell in his article “Imperial Landscape” sorts out the tradition of English landscape paintings with the sense of the expansion of British imperial power.¹⁸⁵ Mitchell comments:

The intrusion of Chinese traditions into the landscape discourse I have been describing is worth pondering further, for it raises fundamental questions about the Eurocentric bias of that discourse and its myths of origin. Two facts about Chinese landscape bear special emphasis: one is that it flourished most notably at the height of Chinese imperial power and began to decline in the eighteenth century as Chinese became itself the object of English fascination and appropriation at the moment when England was beginning to experience itself as an imperial power.¹⁸⁶

With the rise of English imperialism, the expansion was not about going outward in a geographical sense only. Rather, it was expanding inside the empire as well. The more the expansion of the empire was making, the more the empire absorbed and merged from hetero-cultural places other than the home land. The sense of “elsewhere” helped to commence the cultural renewal from outside to inside. W. J. T. Mitchell further explains the phenomenon:

Empires move outward in space as a way of moving forward in time;

¹⁸⁴ Legouix. *Images of China*, p. 13.

¹⁸⁵ W. J. T. Mitchell. “Imperial Landscape”. *Landscape and Power*. Ed. W.J.T. Mitchell. London: The Chicago University Press, 2002, pp. 5-34.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p.9.

the “prospect” that opens up is not just a spatial scene but a projected future of “development” and exploitation. And this movement is not confined to the external, foreign fields toward which empire directs itself; it is typically accompanied by a renewed interest in the re-presentation of the home landscape, the “nature” of the imperial centre. The development of English landscape conventions in the eighteenth century illustrates this double movement perfectly. At the same time as English art and taste are moving outward to import new landscape conventions from Europe and China, it moves inward toward a reshaping and re-presentation of the native land.¹⁸⁷

Alexander’s paintings, in this way, did not commence an artistic dialogue between two empires but a dialogue *within* the British Empire alone. Indeed Alexander took off the imaginary mask of China as a Utopia, but he did not remove the imperial point of view in his paintings. By the time Alexander published and exhibited these works of art in places such as the Royal Academy, the desire for China had turned from the acquisition for chinaware to something more beneficial for both commerce and politics. As Lord Macartney was seeking trade between the two countries, Alexander’s paintings were suggesting that the gaze was not one-way only; more often than not, the gaze was mutual.

Even though Alexander might have planned every opportunity to make money out of this experience in China, his popularity and influence probably exceeded his expectations. As he expanded his influences by holding several exhibitions and by publishing his works of art, he probably did not see how phenomenal his works might become. The fact that *The Costume of China* was “a popular success” was probably not enough to describe the scale of popularity. According to Legouix:

A French edition was published in two volumes in 1815 and the plates were copied in lithography for Bazin de Malpière’s *La Chine*, published in Paris between 1825-?39. Thomas and William Daniell’s *Picturesque Voyage to India by the Way of China* of 1810 is probably influenced in a general way by both plates and text of *The Costume of China* and many of the illustrations by Thomas Allom to the Rev. George Newenham Wright’s *China Illustrated* (1843) include direct borrowings from Alexander’s plates. Further interesting examples of

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 17.

the influence of Alexander's printed work are in the Royal Pavilion, Brighton. The Music Room, thought to have been designed to resemble the Palace of the Great Khan at Shandu as described by Marco Polo, is linked with wall-paintings containing architectural elements and figures taken from *The Costume of China* and the folio plate volume of Staunton.¹⁸⁸

Legouix's words prove to modern readers how the influences of Alexander's works were furthermore extended by being imitated by many later artists and by being applied to many other forms of visual arts. In addition to this, the fact that Alexander's works were widely reproduced and distributed to numerous various collections across the Atlantic and the Continent in the nineteenth century can also demonstrate the phenomenon that they created.

Three Dimensions of China

Apart from the visual account of the embassy, the literary accounts of this travel to China also had great impact on how the general public perceived China. In this section, some accounts by Anderson, Staunton, Barrow and Lord Macartney himself will be examined in a chronological order, in an attempt to compare the differences among these accounts and see how each individual account broadened the horizons of China for the English public at that period.

Being the first published account about the embassy to China, Aeneas Anderson's narrative, *A Narrative of the British Embassy to China in the Years of 1792, 1793 and 1794*¹⁸⁹, was soon widely popular. It not only went into a third reprint within two years, but also the reprints of the book could be seen all over European as well as American countries, including Ireland, France, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, within three years of its first publication at London. One reason behind Anderson's success was his style of language. Coming from a lower social class, Anderson and his vulgar yet lively language style had no difficulty with attracting a large number of the reading public in such short time. With his engaging tone, the work became more accessible to the general reading public. Besides, from the preface to his first edition, Anderson expressed quite clearly that

¹⁸⁸ Legouix. *Images of China*. p. 15.

¹⁸⁹ Aeneas Anderson. *A Narrative of the British Embassy to China, in the Years 1792, 1793, and 1794*. London: J. Debrett, 1795.

he had no intention to exceed what had been done before. Quite on the contrary, in such a brief length of the preface, he emphasised the authenticity of his observations several times. One thing that he shared with most readers is that there was no entry requirement needed for this topic if readers lacked some basic knowledge about China like him. In preface he claims:

It is not my design to examine those writers who have preceded me on the subject of China; it is not for me to point out their contradictions, or display their fabulous interpolations—my only business is to relate what I saw in the course of this embassy, in every part of which I had the honour to attend Lord Macartney, who was appointed to be the representative of his Britannic Majesty at the Court of Pekin [...] I have accurately related every circumstance that came under my observation, with many occurrences which I hear from those, whose authority it would be impertinence, to say no worse, in me to resist. My design is to attempt no more than I am qualified to fulfil, and this volume will be more particularly found to contain a faithful account of the British embassy, with its progress through China [...] The Narrative is faithfully given according to the best of my abilities, and from the most accurate observations in my power to make, during the journey of the embassy by land, or its voyage by water, or its temporary residence in Pekin and Tartary.¹⁹⁰

Anderson is very much aware of his lower social status and his service as only a valet to Lord Macartney. As a result, he remains rather humble in the preface. Also, in order to enhance the credibility of his work, Anderson “also add[ed] the journal of the *Lion* and the *Hindustan* [the ships] from Chufan to Canton, as it contains much curious and useful information relative to the navigation of a long range of the coasts of China not generally known, and may be, therefore, important to the future voyager of the seas that wash them”.¹⁹¹

In his narrative, Anderson gives a comprehensive reading of Chinese daily life in the eighteenth century. What seems interesting to modern readers is his non-genteel manner. As a man who is not particularly well-educated, Anderson ventures his points of view in the bluntest way. Although he errs

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. vii.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. ix.

sometimes, he presents to English readers a Chinese society that is very prosperous under the reign of Emperor Qian-long. In many occasions of his narrative, he shows his general curiosity about this eastern empire. As his account was not directly responsible to the authorities, his observations appear to be the blithest one among all publications about the late embassy to China. Without any pretention, he projects his emotions very directly. For example, Anderson shows his dislike for Chinese cookery without any hesitation. In his narrative, Chinese cookery is one of the few things that he criticises for several times. He describes Chinese cookery as filthy and dirty. Based on some comments that circulated among embassy members, Anderson claims that the Chinese “not only eat all animal food without distinction, but do not discard even such as die or diseases, from their meals”, which makes these foreign visitors “very cautious of what they eat”. Anderson supplies an anecdote about Chinese people’s “indifference” to their food:

But it was not merely from the information of others that we felt a disgust at Chinese cookery, as we had ocular demonstration of the gross appetites of the Chinese people. The pigs on board the *Lion* being affected with a disorder, which is always fatal to these animals, several of them were thrown overboard; which circumstance being observed by the Chinese belonging to the junks, they instantly got out their boats and picked up these diseased carcasses, which they immediately cut up, and having dressed a part of them, appeared to make a very comfortable meal, not unaccompanied with marks of derision of the English for their extravagant delicacy.

We were at first disposed to believe that this grossness of appetite was confined to the lower classes of the people, who were generally in such a state of indigence, as to be glad to obtain meat in the accidental way which we have just mentioned; but we afterwards learned, that the more independent classes of people, and even the mandarins themselves, are not exempt from a custom, in domestic economy, at which the eager appetite of the starving European would revolt.¹⁹²

It is somewhat rather amusing to see that Anderson ridicules Chinese culinary habits, for it appears that Anderson lacked some Chinese culinary

¹⁹² *Ibid*, pp. 95-96.

knowledge. Anderson was probably not aware of that most people in China at that time were no stranger to poverty, and as meat was something that was mainly used and consumed only during festive season such as Chinese New Year, it was natural for people from lower class to obtain such protein. Besides, most of Chinese cooking was done with pretty high temperature, and just like Europeans, the Chinese made cured meat as well. Anderson's quick comments on Chinese cookery demonstrate how the embassy members were not so impressed with the delicacy of Chinese food.

However, apart from cookery, Anderson still finds this ancient empire charming and fascinating. Although by then, Britain had evolved from an agricultural society to the early phase of industrialisation and had some advancement in technology ahead of China, Anderson could still find something peculiarly intriguing to him. As he slightly complains that the Chinese people "burst into shouts of laughter" upon seeing these Westerners, at the same time he compliments Chinese people for the hospitality, for the confectionary, and for their handsome and elegant buildings. Anderson also adds one anecdote about his encounter with Chinese ladies.

When we had passed through the eastern gate of the city [Pekin], some confusion having arisen among the baggage carts, the whole procession was obliged to halt; I, therefore, took the opportunity of easing my limbs, which were very much cramped by the inconvenience of the machine, and perceiving a number of women in the crowd that surrounded us, I ventured to approach them; and, addressing them with the Chinese word Chou-au, (or beautiful) they appeared to be extremely diverted, and gathering round me, but with an air of great modesty and politeness, they examined the make and form of my clothes, as well as the texture of the materials of which they were composed. When the carts began to move off, I took leave of these obliging females by a gentle shake of the hand, which they tendered to me with the most graceful affability; nor did the men, who were present, appear to be at all dissatisfied with my conduct; on the contrary, they expressed, as far as I could judge, very great satisfaction at this public attention I paid to their ladies. It appears, therefore, that in this city, the women are not divested of a reasonable portion of their liberty, and consequently, that the jealousy attributed

so universally to the Chinese men, is not a predominant quality, at least, in the capital of the empire.¹⁹³

This anecdote proves to its readers that Anderson's attitude toward China is quite positive in a general sense. For example, unlike like most popular (pseudo-)oriental literary works, in Anderson's observation, Chinese women are not entirely confined to men, and China is not a despotic country of absolute patriarchal hierarchy only. The "reasonable portion" of these Chinese ladies' liberty demonstrated to Western readers a new possibility to read China as the way it *is*, not as the way it was described or assumed. Like most readers, Anderson does not have many clues about what China is like until he witnesses it with his very eyes. His straightforwardness makes his work very infectious. And the "unofficial" nature of his work makes it seem easy for readers to pick up some pieces about the embassy's journey in China. Without any rhetorical embellishment, and without strong sense of mission, his work is indeed a breath of fresh air compared to other later narratives.

After Anderson's success with his "unofficial" account, the public grew more curious about this mission, and demanded a full official report despite many of other embassy members' personal accounts on the market. The ambassador himself, however, for some unknown reasons, was reluctant to publish his own journal and report of this embassy to China, and thus did not really make strong and immediate impacts on the general public until it was published in 1908 by his descendants.¹⁹⁴ In Macartney's report, he gives a thorough and very detailed description of the journey, including their arrivals at China, how they were received by the Chinese officials, their official visits to the Emperor's summer palace in Jehol, and how they were eventually ordered to leave China with no commercial or diplomatic concessions from China. Although Macartney's journal would have helped the East India Company to make better decisions in terms of trading and establishing stronger commercial ties with the Chinese, the most significant part of Macartney's journal is perhaps his observation and comments on China as a nation. As a member

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, pp. 162-163.

¹⁹⁴ Macartney's journal was not published to the public until the early twentieth century as one of his descendants, Helen Henrietta Macartney Robbins, published the journal. Helen Henrietta Macartney Robbins. *Our First Ambassador to China: An Account of the Life of George, Earl of Macartney, with Extracts from His Letters, and the Narrative of His Letters, And the Narrative of His Experiences in China, as Told By Himself 1737-1806*. London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1908.

of the Literary Club and acquaintances of Voltaire and Dr. Samuel Johnson, Macartney's ideas of China before the trip were still much influenced by the Enlightenment ideas: although the purpose of the embassy was to establish commercial, trading and diplomatic ties and mutual benefits, fundamentally there was an Enlightenment connotation of pursuing the knowledge reciprocity between China and Britain. Nevertheless, after the trip, Macartney greatly modified this view and commented in his journal that

The Empire of China is an old, crazy, first-rate Man of War, which a fortunate succession of and vigilant officers have contrived to keep afloat for these hundred and fifty years past, and to overawe their neighbours merely by her bulk and appearance. But whenever an insufficient man happens to have the command on deck, adieu to the discipline and safety of the ship. She may, perhaps, not sink outright; she may drift some time as a wreck, and will then be dashed to pieces on the shore; but she can never be rebuilt on the old bottom.¹⁹⁵

The first-ever official Sino-Anglo encounter proved to be an utter disappointment to Lord Macartney, as he saw nothing but the decline of China. Moreover, he saw no potential recovery for China to revive from its past glory and predicted the doom of China. Macartney's prediction was not an overstatement; it was an understanding from a man of strong diplomatic background, knowledge and experience. As aforementioned, being the acquaintances of Voltaire and Dr. Samuel Johnson, the ambassador was full of high hope before the journey, but what he saw and how he was treated in China changed his thoughts completely. First of all, Qianlong's foreign policy varied very little from his predecessors, or even from traditional Chinese outlook that has been prevailed for centuries. Although both Yuan Dynasty and Qing Dynasty were established by Tartars instead of Han Chinese, it is interesting that the leaders of both dynasties chose to remain unchanged about most of the traditions as Han Chinese to stabilise the country. On the contrary, Macartney's outlook was a product of the eighteenth-century philosophical concepts of China mainly sent unilaterally from China by missionaries for decades, and proved to be a product that was an ideal and ideology overkill.

¹⁹⁵ George Macartney. Ed. Cranymer-Byng, J.L. *An Embassy to China: Being the Journal Kept By Lord Macartney During His Embassy to the Emperor Ch'ien-Lung 1793-1794*. London: Folio Society, 2004. p. 398.

Macartney's experience in China also echoes back to another Enlightenment writer, Adam Smith. In *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith notices the inconsistent descriptions about the economic status and the unfair distribution of fortune in China, leading him to the assumption that "China has been long one of the richest, that is, one of the most fertile, best cultivated, most industrious, and most populous, countries in the world. It seems, however, to have been long stationary", although he also believes that "China, however, though it may, perhaps, stand still, does not seem to go backwards".¹⁹⁶ Lord Macartney's observation and comments confirmed Adam Smith's assumption.

Lord Macartney's confusion and disappointment are not too difficult to imagine. The Enlightenment had promised a bright future for the reciprocity of knowledge between the European and Chinese intellectuals—if there were to be any. Accordingly, the greatest frustration that Macartney had probably came from the breaking of the bubbles created by the Enlightenment thinkers, instead of failing to deliver on this diplomatic mission. With the wave of Enlightenment ideas inspired by the Confucian philosophy widely shared and circulated in Europe, the European world underwent a transformation in political, philosophical and even scientific aspects because of it. However, this phenomenon, unfortunately, did not take place in China, even though many European missionaries had introduced European advancements in science to Chinese officials. Due to the general negligence, arrogance and self-pride, the Chinese had a tendency to usually put on hold their beliefs in foreign cultures, which, in this phase, created an unbelievable delay in progress of science and technology, as well as a void in knowledge exchange. China would have to wait for nearly another century to realise its long lag in picking up European knowledge and science and started its reformation in the late nineteenth century. Thus, China's reluctance to learn from the Europe at this stage had put its own destiny's to doom. In spite of the unsuccessful mission, Macartney witnessed the weakness in Chinese political system, and he also spotted opportunities for European nations that sought to expand their commercial profits. Macartney stated:

The breaking-up of the power of China (no very improbable event) would occasion a complete subversion of the commerce, not only of

¹⁹⁶ Adam Smith. *The Wealth of Nations*. London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1776, pp. 64-65.

Asia, but a very sensible change in the other quarters of the world. The industry and the ingenuity of the Chinese would be checked and enfeebled, but they would not be annihilated. Her ports would no longer be barricaded; they would be attempted by all the adventures of all trading nations, who would search every channel, creek, and cranny of China for a market, and for some time be the cause of much rivalry and disorder. Nevertheless, as Great Britain, from the weight of her riches and the genius and spirits of her people, is become the first political, marine, and commercial Power on the globe, it is reasonable to think that she would prove the greatest gainer by such a revolution as I have alluded to, and rise superior over every competitor.

Speaking with strong confidence, Macartney acknowledged the past glory of China, but at the same time he witnessed the fall of a power polity. If in the past European imagination, China was merely a fictional construct, a collage of eighteenth-century philosophical ideas, travellers' narratives, and missionaries' accounts, China at present stage was about to be forced to face a series of military actions from European powers in the name of trade and commerce. The isolationism of China's foreign policy would have to be put to a stop, and as Britain, with the occurrence of industrial revolution and technological advancement, rose as a maritime power as it more actively took on many aspects on global scene. And as the relationship between the two countries has moved from the equal status to a new stage of power imbalance, it is unfortunate to see the absence of China's participation in the global politics at that moment. Macartney's insightful observation was actually accompanied by the expanding of European capitalism, which, again, sadly, did not happen in China. The seemingly natural development of European progressivism was still by then not imaginable to the Chinese people, and to most of them, the very idea of foreign progressivism appeared bizarre and peculiar, and all they wanted was to remain the *status quo*. These two different mindsets would yield no common ground for both sides. The collision was inevitable, and the first one was about to happen with the rapid growth of the British commercial needs in sight. While China was gradually feeling threatened by the demands of foreign powers, Britain came to realise that China was not at all a threat. With the proximity of its colony in India to China, , and with China's unawareness of the upheaval of European maritime powers, it was unsurprising that Britain's attitude towards China stiffened. The

adamant, the resistance, and the reluctance for a change made China unable to reckon the fact that the outer world was already rolling on with full force.

Although Lord Macartney was reluctant to publish his own journal and report of this embassy to China, George Staunton was assigned by Lord Macartney to publish “an authentic account”, in order to ensure the correct understanding of the facts about the embassy. As a result of this, Staunton published his narrative under the title *An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China*¹⁹⁷, in 1797. As a semi-official report about this embassy, Staunton’s work adopts a tone that is obviously more appropriate and serious to address this event, and rather dull at times. This might be a necessary evil, because of its nature of an official report to the public. In addition, because of Staunton’s position in the embassy, he had more direct contact with the higher bureaucracies of the Chinese government. However, these experiences were not at all pleasant, and caused Staunton some frustrations. Although Staunton also managed to satisfy some of his readers’ curiosity, there is always a sense of uneasiness about his work. To be more specific, it seems difficult for Staunton to strike a balance between the public’s interest and his personal emotions. For example, on the Sino-centric ideology of Chinese people, Staunton comments:

The Chinese are, perhaps of any people the most eager in their curiosity about foreigners coming amongst them; it being a sight so rare, except at Canton. But about the countries of such foreigners they are more indifferent. They have been always in the habit of confining their ideas to their own country, emphatically styled the middle kingdom. No Chinese ever thinks of quitting it, except a few, of desperate fortunes residing near the sea coast, or of seafaring men, who form a class apart, in great measure, from society. Even foreign commodities consumed in China remind them only of Canton, from whence they receive them as if produced in it. Regions out of Asia are scarcely mentioned in their books, or noticed on their distorted maps.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ George Staunton. *An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China*. London: G. Nicol, 1797.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 238.

Staunton is right in depicting the Sino-centric point of view that Chinese possesses, which is the key to the failure of the embassy. Other than that, Staunton's remarks show a couple of things. First, he is more resourceful than Anderson when it comes to the topic of China. As Anderson's work is more attractive and straightforward, Staunton's observations about China are more cynical and bland. Secondly, with his wider range of knowledge, he is able to compare what he studied previously to what he actually sees in China. This could have been quite fascinating, yet simultaneously there is an evident "sense of purpose" in his judgements. For example, one effort shown in Staunton's narrative is to decipher the diplomatic relations between China and its neighbouring countries. Now this could have provided its contemporary readers with a general idea of the geo-political mapping of East Asia. However, Staunton takes it too far by using it to analyse the factors that might change the result of the embassy, and turns this into some dreary report. As Staunton insists that the failure of the embassy is an unfortunate outcome resulted from a series of misunderstandings, he also believes the fact that had the embassy in 1787 succeeded in staying in Peking and assisted China in pacifying with its neighbouring countries, Macartney's embassy would have been successful.

Apart from the purpose-oriented records, Staunton is less enthusiastic about things he sees in China than Anderson. Implicitly, Staunton suggests China's development falls behind Britain in many respects, such as science and astronomy. At one point Staunton comments on the slow astronomical development in China that

Some of the mandarines [...] were well aware of the true nature of eclipses. They knew also that there were Europeans employed at the Emperor's court in the calculation of them; but believed their own countrymen capable of predicting them with tolerable exactness. It did not appear, however, from their conversation, by what means such predictions were effected. There were indeed, among the Chinese, constant and patient observers; but they did not seem to possess the science of calculation necessary to arrive at the solution of any intricate problems.¹⁹⁹

Under these seemingly-harmless critiques, there lies a real intention to

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 263-264.

explore the true strength of China. By suggesting China's lack of modern scientific advancement, Staunton believes that China is in a desperate need to reform, and ideally, China could surely benefit from input from the West, especially from European countries like England. Another example to show this belief is when Staunton comments on Chinese people's lack of modern usages of compass:

[T]he sphere of Chinese navigation is too limited to have afforded experience or observation for forming any system of laws supposed to govern the variation of the needle. Their knowledge of the general polarity of the magnet answers every purpose, in practice, to that nation; and their researches upon most subjects seem to have been directed chiefly, and to be too often circumscribed, by the immediate prospect of utility resulting from the continuance of every particular pursuit.

The Chinese pilots had soon occasion to perceive how much more essential the perfection of the compass was to the bolder navigators of Europe, than to themselves, as the commanders of the *Lion* and *Hindustan*, trusting to that instrument, stood out directly from the land into the open sea.²⁰⁰

Strategically, Staunton is suggesting that China is not even a worthy competitor for England in terms of sea power. However, at this stage of British diplomatic policy, it has not yet occurred to these Englishmen that China could or should be converted to one of the colonies like India. Rather, as the alliance of China and England is proposed, Staunton is advising that England could be in the place to help China transform from an empire of ancient civilisation to a country of modern commercialisation. In a way, England is well-aware of the influences of China in East Asia, and is thus very mindful of the real strength of China. By establishing this diplomatic tie with China, Britain is convinced that both countries can reciprocally benefit to the best of their interests. However, this is only an ideal for England. After numerous frustrating confrontations between the Chinese Emperor and the complicated Chinese bureaucracy system, the embassy has learnt by then that China ceased its development for some time, and obviously it is not going to revive in any time soon. This attitude toward China is well-demonstrated in Staunton's narrative, and if

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 72-73.

Staunton's account is generally accepted as the semi-official report, this attitude shows how the authorities thought about China at that time. As there is a tension in Staunton's work, it conveys to the readers as the sense that the authorities found it hard to get over the frustrations and humiliations the embassy suffered from the experiences in China.

A decade after the return of the embassy, John Barrow published his ambitious narrative in 1804, under the title *Travels in China*²⁰¹. In this narrative, Barrow draws upon the report of Staunton and takes it further with his own researches on the topic of China. As Barrow asserts, he does not intend to make any comments on politics. Rather, he considers many other dimensions, especially the cultural aspects, to understand China. Barrow states in the conclusion:

I have now gone over most of the points relative to which I have been able to recollect the remarks and observations that arose in my mind during my attendance on this memorable embassy. The comparisons I have made were given with a view of assisting the reader to form, in his own mind, some idea of what rank the Chinese may be considered to hold, when measured by the scale of European nations; but this part is very defective. To have made it complete would require more time and more reading than at present I could command. The consideration of other objects, those of a political nature, which are of the most serious importance to our interests in China, is more particularly the province of those in a different sphere, and would, therefore, be improper for me to anticipate or prejudge, by any conjectures of my own. It belongs to other persons, and perhaps to other times; but it is to be hoped that the information, reflections, and opinions of the ambassador himself, may one day be fully communicated to the public, when the present objections to it shall cease, and the moment arrive (which is probably not very distant) that will enable us to act upon the ideas of that nobleman's capacious and enlightened mind, and to prove to the world that the late embassy, by shewing the character and dignity of the British nation in a new and splendid light, to a court and people in a great measure ignorant of them before, however misrepresented by the jealousy and envy of rivals, or impeded by the counteraction of enemies, has laid an

²⁰¹ John Barrow. *Travels in China*. London: Cadell and Davies, 1804.

excellent foundation for great future advantages, and done honour to the wisdom foresight of the statesman who planned the measure and directed its execution.²⁰²

Unlike Anderson's light-hearted tone, Barrow's narrative is by comparison more focused and pays more attention to details of Chinese culture. And very different from Staunton's focus on the analyses of diplomatic and commercial values between two countries, Barrow's account loses all the uneasiness. Instead, Barrow's narrative purports to understand China from a comprehensive view of the culture. Barrow takes a stance that is of neither Sinophilia nor Sinophobia. Bearing a resemblance to Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws*, Barrow's book endeavours to include, comprehend and compare Chinese culture with European ones. From the linguistic exchanges to mathematics, from literature to architecture, from history to geography, and from botany to civil institutions, Barrow does not hesitate to offer his insights. For instance, at one point Barrow talks about the resemblances between the Chinese language and European ones. He asserts that

The Greek abounds with Chinese words. κύων, a dog, is in Chinese both keou and keun, expressive of the same animal. – good, is not very different from the Chinese hau, which signifies the same quality; and the article – is not far remote from ta, he or that. Both Greeks and Romans might recognise their first personal pronoun --, or ego, in go, or, as it is sometimes written ngo. The Italian affirmative, si, is sufficiently near the Chinese shee, or zee, expressing assent. The French etang, and the Chinese tang, a pond or lake, are nearly the same, and their two negatives pas and poo are not very remote. Lex, loi, le, law, compared with leu, lee, laws and institutes, are examples of analogy that would be decisive to the etymological inquirer. The English word mien, the countenance, and the Chinese mien, expressing the same idea, are nothing different; and we might be supposed to have taken our goose from their goo. To sing is chaung, which comes very near our chaunt. The Chinese call a cat, miao, and so does the Hottentot [...]²⁰³

Barrow's associations with Chinese language with European ones did not

²⁰² *Ibid*, pp. 421-422.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, pp. 162-163.

seem so convincing²⁰⁴, but this kind of associations and comparisons impressed its contemporary readers. To be more specific, Barrow was able to associate what he saw or heard in China with his later studies of China, which produced a mixture of both positive and negative comments—positive from his researches, and negative from his experiences. The associations were actually quite plausible, especially as they bridged the utopian China and the real China. In both Anderson and Staunton's works, rarely could readers see strong associations like this. Barrow's work was thus intriguing in its own way.

Barrow's work was a combination of what the author saw and what he read, and covered various topics. However, very interestingly, among all topics that he studied, Barrow believed that the laws of China in particular would help the Englishmen to see China with full comprehension. Barrow acknowledged the limits to his work, and argued:

It would far exceed the limits of the present work, were I to enter into a detail of their code of laws, which, indeed, I am not sufficiently prepared to do. They are published for the use of the subject, in the plainest characters that the language will admit, making sixteen small volumes; a copy of which is not in England: and I am encouraged to hope that this compendium of the laws of China may, ere long, appear in an able and faithful English translation, which will explain, more than all the volumes that have hitherto been written on the subject of China, in what manner a mass of people (more than the double of that which is found in all Europe!) has been kept together, through so many ages, in one bond of union [...] Of all the despotic governments existing, there is certainly none where the life of man is held so sacred as in the laws of China.²⁰⁵

However ambitious Barrow might be, he did not achieve this master plan. Nonetheless, six years later, one embassy member completed the task for him: it was Thomas Staunton. As young Thomas Staunton translated the Great Qing Legal Code from Chinese into English and published the book

²⁰⁴ Barrow's instances indicate that the sounds of words that he heard were actually dialects rather than mandarin. As the embassy entered China from Canton, Cantonese was the first Chinese dialect they heard, not mandarin. However, most of them were not aware of these linguistic errors. For example, in Alexander's sketch of "cat", he wrongfully noted the pronunciation for "cat" as "meow" where it is actually pronounced as "mao".

²⁰⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 244-245.

as *Ta Tsing Leu Lee: Being the Fundamental Laws of China* in 1810, it was “the very first work ever rendered out of that language [Chinese] into our own,” as *Edinburgh Review* called it.²⁰⁶ Young Staunton’s work not only fulfilled Barrow’s dream but also enhanced the English understanding of the laws of China. Nonetheless, the translation did change the fate of Amherst’s embassy China later in 1816, as the embassy suffered from even harsher humiliation than the previous one.

Another interesting point about Barrow’s narrative is his personal attachment to Lord Macartney and Sir George Staunton. For several times, Barrow cites Staunton’s work as evidences to support his arguments. But it is his strong defence against the public blame of Macartney for the failure that appears intriguing. Barrow employs an anecdote of two Chinese missionaries to London to illustrate how a foreign visitor should feel strange in such an occasion:

If the trade of London were exclusively vested in the hands of eight merchants, and if the foreigners who visited its port could neither speak nor write one single word of the language of England, but communicated solely on every subject with those eight merchants, through a broken jargon, somewhat resembling the languages of the several foreigners, it might fairly be questioned, without any disparagement to the merchants of London, if those foreigners would have less reason of complaint than the Europeans have who now trade to China? Even as things are, would a Chinese arriving in England find no subject of complaint, no grievances nor vexations at the custom-house, which, for want of knowing our language, he might be apt to consider as extortions and impositions? Two years ago two Chinese missionaries landed in England, in their way to the college De Propaganda Fide at Naples. Each had a small bundle of cloaths under his arms, and, according to the custom of their country, a fan in his hand. Being observed by one of those voracious sharks, who, under the pretext of preventing frauds on the revenue, plunder unprotected foreigners, and convert the booty to their own advantage, the poor fellows were stripped by him of the little property they carried in their hands, and were not, without difficulty, allowed to escape with their cloaths on their backs. Can we blame these people

²⁰⁶ Anonymous. “Staunton’s *Penal Code of China*”. *The Edinburgh Review*. August, 1810. pp. 476-499.

for representing us as a barbarous, unfeeling, and inhospitable nation, however undeserving we may be of such a character?²⁰⁷

Barrow's instance again corresponds to his earlier argument that mastering the Chinese language would be the only and the most proper way for the Englishmen to communicate with the Chinese. Besides, he is to use this example to make the reading public more empathetic with the conditions and situations the embassy has to put up with in China. Although Barrow's work does not directly dismiss China as a mere barbarous country and is not necessarily aligned with the general reactions at its time, still it was not difficult to discover some anti-Chinese sentiments after the publication of the book. *The Edinburgh Review* started the fire by complimenting Barrow's book for its "demolition" of a "semi-barbarian race",²⁰⁸ as it condemns Chinese people's "cowardice, uncleanness, and inhumanity" and Chinese language as "the chuckling of poultry more than the language of men". As the gap between the utopian China and the real one was widened, Barrow's work and *The Edinburgh Review's* response demonstrated that the Englishmen were losing their patience with China. The Enlightenment interests in customs or language of China, for example, has been suspended. As the sentiments towards China were stirred and became rather unsettling, they transformed from positive to negative at this stage (and later even fuelled by the failure of Amherst's embassy in 1816). China by now was nothing more than its commercial value, and was rendered as an object to be desired and obtained.

The Faded Fad

Although Alexander's works created a marked increase in public interest in visual representations of China, the literary accounts by the embassy members seemed to put a stop to the Sinophilia in England that lasted for nearly a century—or, at least, make a sharp turn from the great admirations for Chinese craftsmanship in art and philosophy to a great disappointment with the immobility in Chinese technology and civilisation. John Almon, an English political journalist, published a series of poems titled *Ode to the Right Honourable W— P—*²⁰⁹ in 1793, one of which

²⁰⁷ Barrow. *Travels in China*. pp. 418-419.

²⁰⁸ Sydney Smith. "Barrow's Travels in China." *The Edinburgh Review*. January 1805, Vol. 5, pp. 259-283.

²⁰⁹ John Almon. *An Asylum For Fugitive Pieces in Prose and Verse*. London: J. Debrett, 1798, Vol 4: p.15.

praised the possible contribution that the embassy might make in the end.
The poem goes:

Proud China, rich in silver ore,
On Clive's grand scheme – shall yield her store,
And ample funds supply.
Her teas untax'd each cot perfume,
Not Commutation spreads a gloom,
To dim Britannia's sky.

Almon's poem shows that in his time what attracted Britain to endeavour to set up official ties with China were the abundant resources that China could offer. His brutal honesty clearly demonstrated how Britain wanted to take advantage of China's strong financial status and its material resources. This also preluded the ambitious goal of English imperialism to come. In the 1798 edition of this poem, the footnote to "Clive's grand scheme" sheds even more light on this:

As soon as Tippoo Sultan's dominions are equally divided between us, and our gallant and faithful allies, Lord Cornwallis is to carry the late Lord's grand scheme into execution, of conquering China, and paying off the national debt. However, it is thought that Lord Macartney (if he can make himself master the Chinese language—so as to express his ideas with fluency, precision and elegance), will persuade the Emperor to pay us an annual tribute of ten millions a year—and we are to repair—and fortify the Chinese wall—under the immediate inspection and direction of the Duke of Richmond—as an effectual security against the incursions of the Tartars. The fleet lately designed for the Baltic, is to proceed under the command of Lord Hood to conquer the isle of Japan, and annex it to the Chinese empire.²¹⁰

For some Englishmen, were the embassy successful, the Chinese would be paying off a tribute of 10 millions to England to pay down the national debt. For this practical reason alone, the embassy to China was highly anticipated. The general atmosphere and attitude towards this embassy to China were rather up-lifting and optimistic, and lasted until some time after the return of the embassy. Alain Peyrefitte points out:

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Up to June 1794, the London press published highly favourable reports [about the embassy], albeit nine or ten months after the fact [that the embassy failed its mission]. *Gentleman's Magazine* offered its readers flattering descriptions of the pomp and warmth with which the mission had been greeted.²¹¹

This optimistic spirit soon took a strong blow as news about the embassy's failure spread. Lord Macartney's reluctance to make public his reports about China fuelled the public's growing frustration and confusion. Even though he assigned George Staunton to write an account about the mission to clear the air, by the time it was published in 1797, the public opinion had already set the tone that the embassy to China was a nothing but merely a failed attempt. The great expectation was then shattered to pieces.

The one who helped to make the wake-up call was the Aeneas Anderson. Although many of his colleagues later criticised his work for giving some erroneous information about China²¹², Anderson's book was not at all a bad effort. It was this unofficial quality to his book that was the most interesting and thus the most accessible to the general public. In April, 1795, after the book was published, on *The Gentleman's Magazine*, we find the book review to his book. In the review, the sentiments towards China had not soured yet:

He [Anderson] sets out with giving a list of the persons who composed the retinue of the Ambassador; and then proceeds to relate the circumstances of the voyage, which he does with seemingly great accuracy, interspersing it occasionally with descriptions of the places at which they touched, and the occurrences they met with—descriptions the more interesting as the scenes of them like out of the route of common travels; and, in the variety of their particulars, are too diffuse to be encountered in the scanty space we can afford to criticisms of this nature. In his accounts, however, of the various institutions, civil and military, established among the Chinese, some of them do so much honour to the nature of men, and the wisdom of

²¹¹ Peyrefitte. *The Collision of Two Civilisations*, p. 487.

²¹² For example, John Barrow described Anderson "a livery servant of Lord Macartney, vamped up by a London bookseller", and Anderson's book was to use "a speculation that could not fail: so greatly excited was public curiosity at the return of the embassy." See Barrow, *Travels in China*. p. 393.

their government in particular, and at the same time, are so congenial to the best feelings of the heart, that we can hardly forbear to transcribe them.²¹³

This review article showed that the overall attitude towards this travel to China was still based on the discovery of “the particulars” and to satisfy the public’s curiosity. And China was still taken as a country which “do[es] so much honour to the nature of men” and the wisdom of Chinese government, as the article suggested, could shed some light to the Western societies, and British society in particular. This “scanty space for criticisms” was not only commenting on Anderson’s book but also expressing a common concern since the Enlightenment era. As the undertone was to instruct English readers to only make judgements on the basis that China was very different from England and that England could benefit from the Chinese civilisation, the book critique’s intention was to focus on the “Chinese particulars” more than anything else.

In August, 1794, a critical article appeared on *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, revealing the failure of the embassy. The article summarised this journey to China, and gave some fundamental ideas about China, with a special focus on the Great Wall and the trip from Peking to Jehol. The article also analysed the factors that might result in this failure, as the issue of kowtow was brought into light. Since the author of this article believed the failure to be a cultural misunderstanding between two countries which had little knowledge about each other, the tone in this article tended to be slightly negative. As the proposal and requests by Lord Macartney were all rejected, the author remarked that “the Embassy left Peking very much mortified at their want of success.” This anonymous author continued to comment:

The failure in this business cannot be easily accounted for. Perhaps the Mandarinese who attended the embassy were not addressed in the *feeling* manner they expected. Pretty things for the Emperor were only shows to them, and they might wish for something substantial for themselves. It is however supposed, that the want of success is chiefly to be attributed to some evil impressions made upon the Chinese Court by some of the native Princes of India, telling them to

²¹³ Anonymous. *The Gentleman’s Magazine*. Vol. 77. London: Bradbury, Evans & Co., 1795. pp. 318-320.

beware how they allowed the English to obtain a footing among them; and strengthening their admonition by falsely stating, that the same people had first, as friends, obtained small settlements in India, which they afterwards increased by repeated wars, driving many of the original owners from their dominions, and establishing upon their ruin with an immense empire for themselves.

We are happy, however, to add that, when the last accounts left Canton, some arrangements had taken place which indicated a more friendly disposition on the part of the Chinese; and that some hopes had begun to be entertained that it was yet possible to obtain the object of the voyage, though not perhaps without considerable trouble.²¹⁴

The author suspected the failure of the embassy may result from the sabotage by the Indian princes. This is particularly interesting, because it showed that to some English people in Britain had started to be aware of the possibility for the fighting-back power by people in the English colonies and settlements. As the Englishman still denied the potential that Britain might grow into “an immense empire”, we see this as the threshold of an empire on which the sun never sets, since lies and military strength and some “repeated wars” would be the necessary means to control the overseas settlement. In addition to the suspicion, we also find the author was making up a white lie to cover up the total failure of the embassy, as the Chinese at that time had absolutely no intention of making further contact with Britain. Probably because the inaccurate information was given to him, or probably because the government was unwilling to unveil the inconvenient truth to the general public, most of the Englishmen still had some hopes for the future mutual diplomatic and commercial developments, although the author also reckoned that this might not be achieved “without considerable trouble”.

Although no immediate criticism had taken place after the embassy's return, the general idea about the embassy to China was, at least to the common public, an unsuccessful tryout. Anderson's often-cited quote about the experience that “[w]e entered Peking like Paupers, remained in it like Prisoners and departed from it like Vagrants” nearly highlighted the

²¹⁴ S. Shaw. “Particular Narratives of the Late Embassy to China”. *The Gentleman's Magazine*. Vol. 76. London: Bradbury, Evans & Co., 1794, pp. 708-711.

embarrassment the party had to put up with. This unpleasant atmosphere was infectious, since in the next few decades, the general public's attitude towards China was turning from one admiration to one of disillusion. William Winterbotham's book, *An Historical, Geographical, and Philosophical View of the Chinese Empire*²¹⁵, was published in 1795. The advertisement to the book was enthralling:

From the expensive preparations made for the late Embassy to China, the British nation was certainly led to expect that a commercial intercourse would have been opened between the two nations, which might have proved of the utmost importance to both. These hopes have, however, been frustrated and disappointed for the present, but the Embassy has given rise to a laudable spirit of inquiry with respect to the Chinese empire, which we have no doubt will ultimately prove advantageous to British commerce. To aid the inquirer in his pursuit, and to furnish the public at large with the means of obtaining a general knowledge of China, as well as to gratify their curiosity with respect to the Embassy itself, this volume was compiled.

The propriety of blending these two subjects will be readily admitted, when it is considered, that whatever may have been the abilities of the persons who attended the embassy, or however copious the accounts given of it by them, it was impossible for them to obtain any proper idea, or furnish any information of the Chinese empire, in general, from their own observation. This, their situation absolutely precluded, having, to use the language of Mr. Anderson in his account of the Embassy, "entered it like paupers, remained in it like prisoners, and quitted it like vagrants."

This advertisement confirms a few things. First, by 1795, the general public was already aware of the embassy's failure, and the attitude towards China already took its turn. Secondly, Anderson's quotation was widely circulated. Thirdly, it attributed the failure of the embassy to its lack of proper knowledge about China. As the advertisement claimed to bring its readers more accurate information about China, the book also included an appendix of *Narrative of the Embassy to China*. In the introduction of this part, Winterbotham proposes an interesting point:

²¹⁵ William Winterbotham. *An Historical, Geographical, and Philosophical View of the Chinese Empire*. London: J. Ridgway & W. Button, 1795.

Great expenses were incurred, and many exertions made to render this embassy worthy of the country from which it was sent; but perhaps, after all that was done, we shall not err in saying, it was better calculated to succeed with a nation of Indians, or with a petty African Prince, than with the government of China; for if the court of Pe-kin was to be swayed by splendour, much more ought to have been done to have accomplished it than was done; –but supposing the Chinese government to have seriously mediated commercial arrangements, less trick would, perhaps, have succeeded better—be this as it may, the success was what might have been expected, disgrace and contempt—the gentlemen of the embassy had a journey to Pe-kin, and realized the spirit of a distich written on a certain monarch and his army—“March’d up the hill, and then march’d down again”.²¹⁶

The main reason for the embassy’s failure, according to Winterbotham, was because the British embassy did not do things in a straightforward manner, and the gifts prepared for the Chinese Emperor were insufficient. In Winterbotham’s point of view, China could not be compared to such “petty” countries such as India or African countries; rather, China was a country of superiority, and should have been treated, perhaps, as a country of an equal status to England or any other European countries. This being said, Winterbotham was feeling sympathetic towards the embassy, and had a slight sense of patriotism. This self-contradictory view about China and the embassy was explicit, and was shared by most of the learned men at his time. In the past, China had promised a possible renaissance from the East to renew Western civilisation. However, after the reality check by the embassy, China no longer represented a dynamic civilisation. China had fallen from grace, most of the Britons would have agreed after the embassy, as its once-advanced civilisation ceased to develop.

In the next few decades, with the various publications of the embassy to China, China’s status in the English mind dropped drastically. Particularly after the failure of Lord Amherst’s embassy to China in 1816-1817, the English public felt yet again strongly humiliated.²¹⁷ On this occasion of

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ In 1816, Earl William Amherst was sent as ambassador extraordinary to the court of China’s Qing Dynasty in the hope to establish more satisfactory commercial relations between China and the United Kingdom. Upon his arrival at Pei Ho (now Haihe), he was informed to perform the ceremony of kowtow to Emperor Jiaqing, which he refused to

the British embassy's second failure, a political pamphlet titled *A Delicate Inquiry into the Embassies to China*²¹⁸ published in 1818 blamed Lord Macartney for hiding the truth which resulted in the failure of Lord Amherst's embassy. In the same year when the pamphlet was published, a book review on *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British India and Its Dependencies* commented on these two failed travels to China:

Voluminous as are the writings of the missionaries, their ignorance of natural history and the principles of political economy, sciences which at the time when they flourished were yet in their infancy, prevented them from exhibiting the nation in that point of view which would have been most striking and important. They have made us acquainted with the literature of the country, which is generally insipid and unattractive; and with the customs of the inhabitants, which, though curious in themselves, will not vie in point of interest with the more polished nations of antiquity, or of modern times; but on the natural productions of the soil, many of which there is reason to believe are not elsewhere to be found; and on the system of political institutions, by which the largest empire in the world is preserved in a state of the most perfect order and regularity, they have communicated little that is satisfactory.²¹⁹

The consecutive failures of two embassies dimmed the glory of China. Although English people still had interests in China, China had stepped down from its former throne and had come to seem a civilisation that was declining. The more the British learnt from China, the more frustration they suffered. The "China" they came to know was no longer that China which once attracted them. To be more specific, this China was a country that was full of nothing but material peculiarities. The philosophical aspects once admired by the learned in the Enlightenment era were rendered bland, and only the commerce and the trade that could still provoke the interests among the Britons. Since China could not adapt to the cultural changes from the exterior forces, it was doomed to face the

consent, following in Lord Macartney's footsteps. In consequence of his refusal, the embassy was not admitted to enter Peking (now Beijing), and the object of his mission was thwarted.

²¹⁸ *A Delicate Inquiry into the Embassies to China, and a Legitimate Conclusion from the Premises*. London: Thomas and George Underwood & J. M. Richardson, 1818

²¹⁹ *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British India and Its Dependencies*. London: William H. Allen & Co., 1818.

consequences. In Britons' eyes, as China was diminished from a political entity ruled by ancient philosophical standards to merely a material resource, it had lost its charm and could only passively await a change to come. The look of curiosity from the West to China had now transformed into quiet contemplation, and only Chinese material presence in English culture was left. In the next chapter, we will see how Charles Lamb approached China as nothing more than an object to be enquired then acquired, and how the emerging metropolis London perceived and received this once-glorious empire.

Charles Lamb's China: a Material World in the Age of Transition

Since the seventeenth century, the East India Company has been a dominant force when it comes to the trades and commerce in the Far East. With its far-reaching power, the East India Company was undoubtedly an epitome of the ever growing empire of Britain. Although the embassy to China did not return with diplomatic or commercial triumph as the Britons would have expected, there was no denying that the British naval power, as well as its empire ambition, were fast-expanding, and frankly speaking, faster than ever. The proposal to establish several trading ports in China, though declined by the Chinese, was a good example to demonstrate the ambition of the empire overseas. In the meantime, in land, the domain of London was also enlarging. Despite the swift developing of the compass of the British Empire, a quiet clerk in the East India Company office remained unaffected at his desk, depicting a rather different side of the transforming Britain. The man was Charles Lamb.

Charles Lamb, despite the high literary reputation that some of his contemporaries paid him²²⁰ and the lack of modern critical attentions²²¹, is an intriguing character. Lamb's two volumes of essays, *Essays of Elia* and *The Last Essays of Elia*, have since become his best-known works after published. Originally appeared on the *London Magazine* from August 1820 to November 1822, *Essays of Elia* proved so popular that were later compiled and issued as a single volume in 1823 and *The Last Essays of Elia* in 1833. Following the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century essay-writing styles by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, Charles Lamb employs a conversational tone to deal with everyday topics. His witty languages and innovative take on daily-life related topics have made his essays rare and outstanding in quality. However, modern critic Thomas McFarland observes that "Lamb simply does not *interest* very many intellectuals today"²²², and in agreement, Tim Milnes remarks that Lamb

²²⁰ For instance, Thomas De Quincey admirably describes Lamb's *Elia* series as "exquisite" and calls the collection of essays as "a gem amongst the jewellery of literature as any nation can show" and as "cabinet specimens which express the utmost delicacy, purity, and tenderness of the national intellectual, together with the rarest felicity of finish and expression." See Thomas De Quincey, *The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. David Masson. 14 vols. London: A. and C. Black, 1897.

²²¹ Richard Haven, for example, notes that there has been a "surprising absence of real critical discussion of [Lamb's] essays as individual works of art". See Richard Haven. "The Romantic Art of Charles Lamb." *English Literary History* 30 (June 1963): pp. 137-146, p. 137.

²²² Thomas McFarland, *Romantic Cruxes: The English Essayists and the Spirit of Age*.

“does not loom large in studies of the philosophy of the English Romantics”²²³. Milnes points out that the reasons for this phenomenon ranges “from the personal and obvious to the cultural and curious”. McFarland emphasises Lamb’s significance as “a more serious cultural figure” and urges readers to look at Lamb’s whimsy in the context of “larger situation as an exemplar of the Romantic movement.”²²⁴ For Milnes, the “personal” and “obvious” reason underlying in Lamb’s writing is closely related to witnessing his sister’s nervous breakdown and the tragic death of their mother. After this event, Lamb had the constant fear for his sister’s mental illness which haunted most of his life, leading to his melancholy deeper within. The fact that Lamb spent six weeks in the psychiatric hospital made it even more difficult for him to neglect the mental illness shared by his family. As the domestic violence resulted in his anxiety, Lamb took the responsibilities for safekeeping his sister, which not only psychologically imprisoned Lamb but also physically tied most of his adult life to the clerk job in the East India Company. Due to this limit in life, Milnes suggests, “Lamb was rarely permitted the leisure even to dally in the expansive visionary landscapes explored in the epic works of consciousness of his friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth and Robert Southey”.²²⁵ This familial obligation also forbade Lamb to indulge in drugs, an artificial paradise for many other Romantic writers, McFarland comments. While the wanderlust in nature and in alien or ancient cultures, or in other form of “Romantic imaginary land of escape” provides temporary exit for many of his contemporaries, none is available to Lamb. Gerald Monsman also argues that the *Elia* essays are products of Lamb’s exteriorization of his creative longing and personal anguish.²²⁶ Writing under the persona of Elia, Lamb was able to shelter the fragile inner self from the psychologically traumatic experience. The most well-known feature of Lamb’s writings, in other words, is in fact a defence mechanism when he faced the non-domestic scenes.

Many critics have also associated Lamb with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who was a childhood friend of Lamb’s and played an essential role in

New York: OUP, 1987, p. 25.

²²³ Tim Milnes. “Charles Lamb: Professor of Indifference”. *Philosophy and Literature*, 28 (November, 2004): pp. 324-341, p. 324.

²²⁴ McFarland, p. 25.

²²⁵ Milnes, p. 324

²²⁶ Gerald Monsman, *Confessions of a Prosaic Dreamer: Charles Lamb’s Art of Autobiography*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1984.

Lamb's life. Karen Fang, for example, explores many of previous critical examinations and concludes that Coleridge is often cited as "the archetypal representative of Romantic imagination" that Lamb knows of, and because of the intimate friendship between the two, Coleridge "anchors the predominantly biographical criticism on Lamb that accounts for his distinctively precious tone as an evasive expression of his sense of literary inferiority".²²⁷ McFarland's chapter on Lamb also scrutinises the relationship between the poet and the essayist, and infers that Coleridge works as the alter ego for Lamb to shield his anxiety and his sense of inferiority to the poet. As a result of this anxiety, Lamb projects for his alter ego Coleridge the ultimate largeness of poetry, while he retreats into smallness and prose. McFarland also sees Lamb's whimsy as a device to avoid real-life confrontation with Coleridge (and Wordsworth) and loss of support from them. McFarland's chapter on Lamb analyses many of Lamb's biographical facts, and his correspondence with his circle of friends, particularly Coleridge. It offers a very close reading of Lamb's life and his interpersonal network. The chapter demonstrates Coleridge's profound impact on Lamb, but overemphasises how this unsuccessful friendship contributes and affects Lamb's literary style as well as life. There is no denying that the ghost of Coleridge lingers in Lamb's writings, yet like McFarland, many critics stress too much on Lamb's biographical facts while ignoring his literary achievement, which leaves an incomplete picture of him. It is however in these two volumes of *Elia* essays that can best register Lamb's range as a writer. His gentleness and humbleness, if not seen as a sense of inferiority to Coleridge, can still be viewed as a shielded imploded self, because like many of his contemporaries, Lamb also witnesses the gigantic changes in the society. The uncertainties of the reality dread and disappoint these writers, and make them turn away to seek inner emotional connections with the outer world. For poets like Coleridge and Wordsworth, they expand and externalise the spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions through recollecting the self, the imagination of pure fantasy, and through the inspirations from the exotic civilisations. Lamb, nevertheless, finds his unique way, albeit his familiarities with these literary representations. He is accustomed to his urban—as well as domestic—obligation. With the yoke of his life, he manages to seek consolation in the blooming city of London where he

²²⁷ Karen Fang, "Empire, Coleridge, and Charles Lamb's Consumer Imagination". *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 43:4, pp. 815-843, p. 816.

stores his great passion. His enthusiasm for everyday topics makes his aesthetics one of a kind.

Lamb is a man of “intellectual differences” and “peculiar taste,” as De Quincey writes of him. Although Lamb himself admires the poetic genius of Wordsworth and Coleridge, his own prose writing is by no means any inferior. His ability to extent his own urban life experience is an innovation in the genre itself. Working as a clerk for more than three decades in the East India Company not only provides more than sufficient financial support for him and his sister Mary but also equips him with lush texture and organic point of view to his works. It is thus easy to assume that Lamb might not be a stranger to oriental fantasies or materials; or, at least, this particular working experience could have lent some light to his prosaic art on the topic of the Orient. Yet peculiarly enough, there is a nearly-blank, unfilled absence on this theme in Lamb’s works. From published essays to unpublished correspondence with his friends, Lamb does not seem interested in the Orient or China so much as his fellow writers. Even among his few works related to this topic, Lamb holds a different viewpoint from other writers of his time. Some of the best examples are shown in Lamb’s correspondences to his friends, especially two intimate friends, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Thomas Manning, who not only provide Lamb with substantial emotional support that he needs but also a great deal of creative ideas that, if not inspires Lamb, arouses Lamb’s acute responses to the topic of the Orient.

Coleridge’s famous poem “Kubla Khan” is arguably one of the best examples that can demonstrate the Romantic sentiment towards the topic of the Orient. In “Kubla Khan”, Coleridge states how he is inspired by Marco Polo’s visit to the Khan capital, Shan-du. The work, as a result of his “vision in a dream”, is composed in rhythmic, melodic and symbolic language, which allows a wide variety of interpretations. As Coleridge himself claims, the poetic piece is partly summoned by the anodyne, and partly summoned by his reading, and more importantly, by his lifelong obsessive pursuit of the dream vision. Coleridge is known to be fascinated by the states of mind between those of sleeping and waking. And while his dream vision is induced and introduced by the use of opium, the poetic language is also induced by the hypnotic state. Thus, Xanadu (Shan-du) is no longer a mere geographical locale but a land of mythical atmosphere and mystical quality. Xanadu is “bright” and “fertile”, girdled around with

“towers and walls”; below, the sacred river runs through the “romantic chasm” that is “measureless to man” and “[d]own to a sunless sea”. The vastness of the landscape is adorned with the touch of the exotic. The place is “savage” but at the same time “holy” and “enchanted”. “The shadow of the dome of pleasure / float[ed] midway on the waves”, and it was very place that offered Kubla Khan a chance to hear “[a]ncestral voices prophesying war”. The historical and the natural at the beginning of the poem soon slide into the supernatural, gothic romance, and the fertile becomes lifeless. This Eastern Tartar Empire is thus romanticised: it not only describes the grandeur of the fantastic empire but also epitomises a writer’s inspiration. It is grand, beautiful, yet at the same time, fleeting and fragile. The last few lines in the last stanza particularly illustrate the image of a writer with full inspiration. Thus, the poem contains the dark quality of mystic beauty, and on this very vibrant, vivid landscape, death casts a prolonged shadow and the decline of the empire awaits. The prophesied war heard by Kubla Khan foretells the decline of the empire. Thus, the poem is never and can never be a unified whole; it is fragmentary at its very best, because the empire is destined for its doom. This fragmentary element is fortified by the poet’s anecdote: the dream vision was interrupted by an anonymous visitor from Porlock whose unexpected visit had cost the poet’s fantastic vision and the overflowing inspiration was thus cut short. The yearning and the desire to complete the vision were left with a sigh of regret as the symphonic song of the inspiration cannot be revived.

Contrary to Coleridge’s regret and passion for the incomplete vision of “Kubla Khan”, Lamb appears rather uninspired in his response to the poem. After Coleridge completed “Kubla Khan”, Lamb expressed his concerns in a letter to Wordsworth:

Coleridge is printing "Christabel," by Lord Byron's recommendation to Murray, what he calls a vision, "Kubla Khan", which said vision he repeats so enchantingly that it irradiates and brings heaven and elysian bowers into my parlour while he sings or says it; but there is an observation, "Never tell thy dreams," and I am almost afraid that "Kubla Khan" is an owl that won't bear day-light. I fear lest it should be discovered by the lantern of typography and clear reducing to

letters no better than nonsense or no sense.²²⁸

Lamb took Coleridge's oriental vision as "nonsense" or "no sense", and was very much worried that this particular piece would be "an owl that won't bear day-light", a piece that should not be made public. Lamb's concerns appear genuine and sincere, though a bit untimely. Despite being in awe of Coleridge's poetic genius, Lamb himself is quite reserved about this work. Lamb here uses the "lantern of typography" as a symbol that presents the eastern culture and history as a feeble light in contrast to the poet's shimmery genius. The fear of Lamb's is never specified, but he dreads that the public opinions would open fire at his friend, and the eastern topic could reduce his friend's talent to mere "letters", not even words, nor poetry. Thus, although Coleridge "repeats so enchantingly" and the work seems to "irradiate", yet for Lamb, he barely regards the poem as a dream that should or could be told.

Lamb's response to Coleridge's poem is not the only case that he shows his lack of deeper interest to this specific subject matter. In a private letter dated in February, 1803, Lamb again earnestly appealed to his friend, Thomas Manning, one of the pioneering Sinologists at their time for emotional support. In this letter, Charles Lamb attempts to persuade his beloved friend not to start off his trip to the East.²²⁹ To do so, Lamb wrote about horrors of cannibalism among Tartar people:

My dear friend, think what a sad pity it would be to bury such *parts* in heathen countries, among nasty, uncoversable, horse-belching, Tartar people! Some say, they are Cannibals; and then conceive a Tartar-fellow *eating* my friend, and adding the *cool malignity* of mustard and vinegar! [...] The Tartars, really, are a cold, insipid,

²²⁸ Charles Lamb. *The Life, Letters, and Writings of Charles Lamb, in Six Volumes*. New York: Cosimo Classics, 2008. Vol II: p. 130

²²⁹ Thomas Manning developed interest in Chinese language and people in his early years, and went to Paris to study Chinese under Dr Hagar at the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1802. He later obtained permission from the court of directors of the East India Company to travel there and lived in the English factory as a doctor in 1805, and in 1806 he left England. He arrived at Parijong, and in 1808 he arrived at Cochin China, then he stayed in Canton until 1810. In the 1811, Manning travelled to Lhasa, and was even granted permission to stay with Dalai Lama for five months. Thomas Manning was sent back to India in 1812, then again returned to Canton, and in 1816 he accompanied Lord Amherst's embassy to Peking as junior secretary and interpreter. In 1817 Manning returned to England, and left again for Italy where he spent two more years in 1827. He came back to England to spend his later years, and died in 1840. The journal of his journey to Lhasa was barely known until published in 1879.

smouchey set. You'll be sadly moped, (if you are not eaten) among them²³⁰. (*Works*, I: 267)

Although oriental travelogues already gained growing popularity since mid-eighteenth century²³¹, Lamb's worries for his friend here are partly rather comical; but mostly, they reveal his limited knowledge about the Orient. As the Tartars becomes the archetypal race for East Asians, the East is reduced to a one-dimensional locale which is barely civilised, and the Orient is oversimplified as a pagan land full of barbarians.²³² In short, the Orient is the land of the Other. Lamb cleverly associates his concerns with unpleasant sensual descriptions and even some sour and spicy flavours to his depictions of the barbarous land. His fears not only lies in the physical level alone (eat / being eaten) but also in a psychological depth. In the same letter, Lamb "tremble[s]" for Manning's "Christianity", for he dreads that the Tartars "will certainly circumcise" Manning. Lamb's references to circumcision and cannibalism symbolise the removing and the devouring of human flesh, which also suggests the regression of human civilisation from the angle of a Christianity-based Western culture. And, on the contrary, the Tartars, an interchangeable term for the Eastern Asian race, possess the power of violent act, and the undefined power of Otherness.

Lamb's concerns might originate from his shock upon seeing a Tartar-man "exhibiting at Exeter Change"²³³, which he suggested Manning to go talk

²³⁰ *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*. Ed. E.V. Lucas. 7 Vols. London: Methuen & Co., 1912. Hereafter, *Works*.

²³¹ In Ros Ballaster's *Fabulous Orient*s, Ballaster notes that "[T]he western construct of the 'Orient' in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was shaped through the medium and techniques of narrative fiction, even in ostensibly non-fictional forms such as the traveller's account." See Ros Ballster, *Fabulous Orient*s: *Fictions of the East in England 1662-1785*. Oxford: OUP, 2007, p. 32.

²³² Michael Keevak closely examines the history between the East and the West, and observes that the "fears of a barbaric East" has been strongly linked to danger in Western civilisation for centuries, and various tribes, such as Persians, Huns, Turks, Tartars, and Mongols, are all examples. Keevak points out, by the eighteenth century, just before Blumenbach's racial classification came out in 1795, historian Gibbon has included a special chapter on the "uncivilised north-eastern" "pastoral nations" as one of the main causes of the collapse of the Roman Empire. See Michael Keevak, *Becoming Yellow: a Brief History of Racial Thinking*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011, p. 125.

²³³ Further information of this Tartar-man exhibition is nowhere to be found. However, judging from the location of the exhibition, namely the Exeter Change, is a fairground for travelling menageries, exhibiting wild animals and a "grand collection of living curiosities." Gilbert Pidcock and Stephanus Polito both ran Exeter Change for a while, and notably during Polito's time, it became the haunt of poets like William Wordsworth and John Keats. It attracted thousands of people every year. URL <http://www.fairground-heritage.org.uk/newsite/research/research-menageries.html>

with the Tartar, to “get the idea out of [Manning’s] head.” Though Lamb himself does not say much about this exhibition, yet his words imply that the very sight of it stirs his inner worries and fear. Lamb’s terrors about the heathen land drive him to include a personal instruction of dos and don’ts in the letter:

Shave yourself oftener. Eat no saffron, for saffron-eaters contract a terrible Tartar-like yellow. Pray, to avoid the fiend. Eat nothing that gives the heart-burn. *Shave the upper lip*. Go about like an European. Read no books of voyages (they’re nothing but lies): only now and then a Romance, to keep the fancy *under*. Above all, don’t go to any sights of *wild beasts*. *That has been your ruin*. Accustom yourself to write familiar letters on common subjects to your friends in England, such as are of a moderate understanding. And think about common things more. (*Works*, I: 267)

Lamb wants Manning to “[G]o about like an European”, rather than to accustom himself to the new environment. Lamb also asked Manning to “think about common things more”, with the undertone that things from or about the East might be uncommon and peculiar. Lamb’s dos and don’ts range from food for stomach to food for soul, which not only reflects his personal worries but also a growing trend of racial thinking at this age. The physical features of both races come forward in the text, noticeably the skin complexion of Tartar-yellow in contrast of the European whiteness; the upper lip should be shaved in contrast of beardlessness of the East Asian people; the diet should be taken into serious consideration, as Europeans at this era often appealed to food or other natural phenomena to explain the colours of different races²³⁴. Lamb’s descriptions strengthened the exotic—and quite often negative—images of the Orient as a device to defend and define the Englishness that bound Manning and him together. Although Lamb himself has never been to the East in his life, nor has he had a better understanding of the East than Manning, the primitive form of the Tartar man is an epitome of his (and his contemporaries’) Eurocentric ideas of the East: the confluence of the regressions in humanity and civilisation, along with the notion of racial inferiority. The Tartar man is merely a spectacle, a curiosity, a superficial

(accessed April, 2008)

²³⁴ For more discussions about the racial ideas of the Mongolians at this age, see Michael Keevak. *Becoming Yellow: a Short History of Racial Thinking*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011. pp. 23-42.

image that contained no authentic cultural essence or heritage. Although Lamb only goes by the visual stimulation that the Tartar exhibition offers, he translates this abstract psychological fear into physical things such as cannibalism, circumcision, and everyday behaviours. Like many of his contemporary writers, Lamb demonstrates a Eurocentric view in his imaginary passage to the East, and this view is mixed with accurate information, misconception, stereotypes, and sometimes, in Lamb's own words, "popular fallacies". Lamb employs the sharp contrasts between the modern civilised European manners and the nasty, primitive Tartar fashion. In other words, Lamb's concerns for Manning dwell on a more pragmatic and realistic aspect on daily basis, a characteristic that Lamb constantly shows where his passion lies. His prosaic inspiration in the everyday can only make sense in the solid base of London, and only in London, the blooming international trade, along with the emergence of commercial society, make the handsome luxury that he is passionate for accessible and possible.

Only in London

Lamb first established a writing career as an essayist for John Scott's *London Magazine* in 1820. The publications of *Elia* and *The Last Essays of Elia* formed the chief cornerstones of his fame. By then Charles Lamb had come to be recognised as a major figure on London's cultural scene. The series of *Elia* essays is well-known for Lamb's engaging reminiscences of his contemporary life in the city of London. In other words, Lamb's life in the metropolis is fairly presented, and London becomes an indispensable figure in his writings. These daily fragments and pieces rejoin themselves and compose a lovely tune of the metropolis. In two volumes of *Elia* essays, Lamb paints an exhaustive panorama of London, something that the general public could easily relate to, contributing to the wide popularity of *Elia* essays.²³⁵

Lamb's writing, accordingly, makes more sense in an urban context. And only in such a context, Lamb's craftsmanship and his deep, personal connections with the exterior world, especially how he interacts with the

²³⁵ When *Elia* essays were published on *London Magazine*, the estimated number of circulation was about 2,000 copies. Later when the essays were compiled in the form of books, both volumes reached 1,000 copies in England. The number of the American reprint also reached 500 copies. See William St Clair. *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*. Cambridge: CUP, 2004.

metropolis, can substantiate. As aforementioned, Lamb could not find his escape of life like many of his contemporaries, in particular, Wordsworth and Coleridge. Urbanity is thus not only his artistic trait but also his private haunt, a source he draws inspiration from. As poets' wanderlust drives them to pursue solace in the nature, Lamb seeks his consolation in the city. For instance, in a correspondence with Wordsworth in 1801, the poet invited Lamb to visit his sister and himself to Cumberland, yet the essayist politely declined, saying despite the imaginable enjoyment in the company of the poet and his sister, he did not "much care if [he] never see a mountain in [his] life." Lamb claimed that he had "passed all [his] days in London" until he had "formed as many and intense local attachments". And he jokingly compared these "local attachments" to "Mountaineers can have done with dead nature". Lamb then proceeded to paint an energetic scene of London:

The Lighted shops of the Strand and Fleet Street, the innumerable trades, tradesmen and customers, coaches, waggons, playhouses, all the bustle and wickedness round about Covent Garden, the very women of the Town, the Watchmen, drunken scenes, rattles;—life awake, if you awake, at all hours of the night, the impossibility of being dull in Fleet Street, the crowds, the very dirt & mud, the Sun shining upon houses and pavements, the print shops, the old Books stalls, parsons cheap'ning books, coffee houses, steams of soups from kitchens, the pantomimes, London itself a pantomime and a masquerade, all these things work themselves into my mind and feed me without a power of satiating me. The wonder of these sights impells me into night-walks about her crowded streets, and I often shed tears in the motley Strand from fullness of joy at so much Life. (*Works*, I: 213)

London as a cultural signifier is of significance here: it is vibrant, because it sees the rise of the global trade; it witness the expanding cityscape; and most importantly, it testifies the rise of the commercial society. The emerging "middle-class" people can benefit from the conveniences of the metropolitan life. Covent Garden, the locale itself, is the heart of London commerce, and speaks of the lively scene of urban life.²³⁶ Lamb's

²³⁶ Vic Gatrell notes that by the early eighteenth century, with the grand people moving westwards, Covent Garden was left to "market stalls and itinerant shows". And as coffee-houses, taverns, and bagnios multiplied, this place became "the centre of

passionate defence is purely romantic. As many of his contemporaries struggle to see London even as a city of greatness²³⁷, Lamb responds to the city with whole-hearted embrace. To him, the city is a “pantomime” and a “masquerade”, and he does not have to inquire about the entertainments because they “work themselves into his mind”. The liveliness that the city has to offer is to others a mixture of majestic beauty and desperation and falsehood²³⁸, whilst to Lamb it is a city of merits.

Writing to William Wordsworth who always accords highest value to nature, Lamb does not yield his enthusiasm about urban life. Lamb even furthers his own defence and summons his love for the worldly goods, a preoccupation with materials that lies in his obsession with the quotidian life, not the practical functions of these items. Thus, in the presence of Wordsworthian value system, he would rather live “with handsome visible objects” in the city than envy those who appreciate the “Beauties of Nature”. The word “visible” is a central point to Lamb’s aesthetics, since these visible and visual objects are what he perceives and writes about. In other words, abstract imagination is rarely the source that Lamb draws his inspiration from; he puts more emphasis on concrete, physical objects. Hence, when many Romantic writers turn their faces away from industrialised urban scenes to nature, Lamb, in the emerging metropolitan city of London, acknowledges—rather than despises—the filthy, nasty, and even vile bits of city. While the poets write odes to the nature, Lamb gives his eulogy to the metropolis.

The theme of metropolitan eulogy continues and recurs throughout Lamb’s writing. In another correspondence with his friend Thomas Manning in 1802, Lamb transcribed an essay titled “The Londoner”, which was first published on *Morning Post* in February, 1802. In this essay, Lamb yet again elaborated his strong connection with the city where he

proto-Bohemia”. See Vic Gatrell. *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London*. London: Atlantic Books, 2006. p. 82.

²³⁷ Wordsworth, for instance, has a hard time depicting London in a cheerful tone. In *The Prelude*, the poet dedicated Book Seventh (titled *Residence in London*) to his years in London. He shows his great ambivalence as he acknowledges the varieties, stimulation, human contacts of all walks of life and all races in London, simultaneously, he also thinks of the city as the grotesque, a site of instability, chaos, and a corrupt form of Imagination.

²³⁸ For instance, in 1802, William Wordsworth published both “London, 1802” and “Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802”. The former summoned John Milton, calling him to return again with “manners, virtue, freedom and power” while the latter shed a beam of hope, celebrating a beautiful sunrise that gave the poet “a calm so deep” he “never felt” in the city before. However, Wordsworth’s overall reaction to the city was not as positive as those to the Nature.

was born and grew up with:

To return to *myself* (from whence my zeal for the Public good is perpetually causing me to digress), I will let thee, Reader, into certain more of my peculiarities. I was born (as you have heard), bred, and have passed most of my time, in a *crowd*. This has begot in me an entire affection for that way of life, amounting to an almost insurmountable aversion from solitude and rural scenes. This aversion was never interrupted or suspended, except for a few years in the younger part of my life, during a period in which I had fixed my affections upon a charming young woman. Every man, while the *passion* is upon him, is for a time at least addicted to groves and meadows, and purling streams. During this short period of my existence, I contracted just enough familiarity with rural objects to understand tolerably well ever after the *Poets*, when they declaim in such passionate terms in favour of a *country life*. (*Works*, V: 242)

This essay was published twice. Sixteen years later, in 1818, a shorter edited version of this essay appeared on *The Reflector*.

I was born, as you have heard, in a crowd. This has begot in me an entire affection for that way of life, amounting to an almost insurmountable aversion from solitude and rural scenes. This aversion was never interrupted or suspended, except for a few years in the younger part of my life, during a period in which I had set my affections upon a charming young woman. Every man, while the passion is upon him, is for a time at least addicted to groves and meadows and purling streams. During this short period of my existence, I contracted just familiarity enough with rural objects to understand tolerably well ever after the *poets*, when they declaim in such passionate terms in favour of a country life. (*Works*, VII: 46)

These two versions of “The Londoner” are of no major differences, yet if more closely scrutinised, it is easy to find the latter version more sophisticated, with the language style much refined. Lamb’s unique sense of humour still remains, but the cheerful, playful and chatty tone of the earlier version turns subtle. The intimacy the latter version offers is reduced. Nonetheless, no matter how these two versions have been edited, the title “The Londoner” refers to no one else but Lamb himself. Lamb the

Londoner claims that “I will do my best endeavour to *write them down*” because “[t]he very disformities of London, which gives distaste to others, from habit do not displease me”. The “skilful Pantomime” never stops feeding the essayist with all the humour, curiosity, and interests, and this very *Londoner* rewards the city with his ardent love and writings. In opposition to Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s value system, Lamb is more inclined to be a secular, urban writer, despite the city-bound limitations restrains him from in a grander perspective of imagination. His essay “The South-Sea House” is particularly interesting in this sense. Among *Elia* essays, “The South-Sea House” is not the first essay that Lamb completed, but the first one published. In this essay, Lamb tailors his real life working experience to the persona of Elia, and the silhouettes of his co-workers seem clear against this “magnificent relic”.²³⁹ Lamb gives detailed and vivid descriptions to each figure, and “this solemn mockery” closed with the very traits of Lamb’s writings:

Much remains to sing. Many fantastic shapes rise up, but they must be mine in private...Readers, what if I have been playing with thee all this while—peradventure the very *names*, which I have summoned up before thee, are fantastic—insubstantial...Be satisfied that something answering to them has had a being. Their importance is from the past. (*Works*, II: 7-8)

In “South-Sea”, Lamb shows his great awareness of his readership, especially those in London. South-Sea House, as one of the pioneering trading companies, once had it glory but later dimmed. That said, it is not difficult to imagine a company like South-Sea would sustain strong in public memory. As a result, when presenting his personal memories and private life to the public, Lamb blurs the fine line between the private and the public, allowing the engagement of the readers in the locale of London. Thus, in this locale of exchange, Lamb testifies his materials for writing

²³⁹ Founded in 1711, South Sea Company was created on the basis of the public-private partnership in order to consolidate and reduce the national debt. As the company name suggests, it was granted the monopoly to trade with Spanish colonies in Middle and South America. With no specific plan or realistic prospect that the trade would take place, and due to the involvement of the wars with Spain, the company’s monopoly never returned with much profit. However, the company’s stock value once greatly climbed, and expended its operational dealing with the government debt. Peaked in 1720, the stock value of the company soon collapsed and then fell to slightly above its original flotation price, resulting in the well-known “South Sea Bubble”. After the “South Sea Bubble”, the company still continued its management of the part of the National Debt until being abolished in 1850s.

are “from the past” and “had a being” albeit being “insubstantial”. But with the act the writing, Lamb revives these personal reminiscences against the public image of the South-Sea House. In other words, the South Sea House is not so much about the trade itself, but is a direct borrowing from the grand, magnificent, and shared public memories in order to contrast the intimate, personal, trivial life.

As the correlation, the interconnection and the interchange between the private and the public all take place in Lamb’s writings, as a writer who is highly sensitive to the pulsation of time, Lamb responds to the expansion of the metropolis and the rise of the commercial society in an unusual way. With the industrial revolution prospering, it facilitated the transportation, and accelerated the development of technology and urbanity. Other forms of revolution also took place, bringing out the old ethics of life and bringing in the new system of value. In the city, these transitions occurred, and the lines between the old and the new, the domestic and the foreign, the private and the public became blurred. And to Lamb, he constantly vacillates between two poles of values, but eventually he always returns to the trivial objects in the urban scenes. As Wordsworth demonstrates in Book Seventh of *The Prelude*, London is “the mighty city herself / To thousands upon thousands of her sons, / Living amid the same perpetual whirl / Of trivial objects, melted and reduced / To one identity, by differences / That have no law, no meaning, and no end”²⁴⁰. The poet’s dislikes of lawless, meaningless and endless trivial objects are exactly what the essayist enjoys, and the essayist has to find his prosaic strength against the overshadowing poetic genius. The tangible, concrete objects shuttle forwards and backwards through the warp of his writings, and nearly dominate his recognition of the exterior world, which also sets Lamb’s writing about the East apart from his peers’.

“That world before perspectives”

When it comes to Charles Lamb’s writing on the East, “Old China” is arguably the most discussed essay, not because it plays with the oriental fantasy and imagination like Coleridge does in his “Kubla Khan”, but because it showcases Lamb’s obsessive love for the *chinaware* in lieu of China, the geographical location itself. More interestingly, despite his

²⁴⁰ *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850: Authoritative Texts, Context and Reception, Recent Critical Essays*, eds. Jonathan Wordsworth, et al. New York: Norton, 1979. p. 265.

close friendships with both Coleridge and Manning, or in spite of the fact that he works as a clerk for British East India Company for most of his life, Lamb cares not so much for the capital *China* but very much for the *chinaware*. In this sentiment, China loses its authentic geographical significance while chinaware gains its cultural and personal significance in Lamb's essay, and eventually China is replaced by the fragile chinaware.

"Old China" opens with the sentence, "I have an almost feminine partiality for old china". This personal preference is a confirmation of the persona's self-awareness of his masculinity in crisis, and a reconfirmation of the fact that the chinaware has attracted mainly the female consumers²⁴¹. The title "Old China" thus denotes neither about the history of the ancient civilisation nor about the geographical location; it refers to the old chinaware that Elia used to keep. It moves from the shared public discussion of the country China to what Lamb did the best: the remembrance of the time past. As feminine desirable objects, "chinaware" becomes the materials that Elia fancies and willingly "inquire[d]" and "acquire[d]". Elia then proceeds,

I can call to mind the first play, and the first exhibition, that I was taken to; but I am not conscious of a time when china jars and saucers were introduced into my imagination. I had no repugnance then—why should I now have?—to those little, lawless, azure-tinctured grotesques, that under the notion of men and women, float about, uncircumscribed by any element, in that world before perspectives—a china tea-cup. (*Works*, II: 281)

Elia is able to recall where he "was taken" to a play or an exhibition, but he is unable to recall when these oriental objects "were introduced" to him. Elia comprehends the exterior world in a passive way ("introduced", "taken"), rather than active. The word "introduce[d]" suggests an intimacy and special linkage between chinaware and the narrator as chinaware is introduced to his "imagination" instead of his memory. This word choice

²⁴¹ In the eighteenth-century luxury debates, gender has been one of the major concerns, as the interest in luxury was often associated with the dangers of effeminisation and perilous female desires. Yet, on the opposite, women consumers were a collective strength that not only remoralise the luxury by domesticating the exotic but also put luxury forward as a socially progressive force. See Edward Hundert. "Mandeville, Rousseau and the Political Economy of Fantasy". *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods*. Eds. Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger. New York: Palgrave Macmillian Ltd., 2003. pp. 28-40.

depicts that the world of the chinaware might as well be his *imagination*. The following detailed description of a china teacup thus showcases his imagination. What he sees in the teacup are the “uncircumscribed” scenes with “lawless, azure-tinctured grotesques”, and is a “world before perspectives”. It indicates that China is present *in front of* the European perspective, and is *prior to* the European civilisation. Consequently, the world in Elia’s chinaware imagination lacks both in its optical dimensions and cultural depths, as it stays only on the superficial level of vision as well as understanding. Ultimately, it is a chaotic and “grotesque” world. China, as presented on the Chinese teacup, is an opaque entity. In the following paragraph, Elia further shows the contrast between the observer and the observed. He elaborates that

I like to see my old friends—whom distance cannot diminish—figuring up in the air (so they appear to our optics) yet on terra firma still—so we must in courtesy interpret that speck of deeper blue, which the decorous artist, to prevent absurdity, has made to spring up beneath their sandals. (*Works*, II: 281)

Elia’s observation shows that China as a geographical entity is a world of the Other, a third-person plural form of *they*, while the observer sees from and with the first-person viewpoint *our* that cleverly includes his readership. Elia acknowledges the unbridgeable distance between England and c/China where *we* “must interpret in courtesy”. The first-person viewpoint owns the power to interpret, leaving these little Chinese figures being interpreted, even though it is done “in courtesy” in order “to prevent absurdity”. In other words, the first-person vision sees the absurdity which he is very much aware of. One of the absurdities that follows in Elia’s later discussion is when he asserts that he “love[s] the men with women’s faces, and the women, if possible, with still more womanish expressions”. By articulating that, Elia reconfirms that the East, in the light of Western world, is feminised and racially castrated.²⁴² Eventually, this imaginative “uncircumscribed”, “lawless” land needs to be put into perspective, needs to be understood, comprehended, and interpreted while it provoked the

²⁴² “Racial castration” is an idea proposed by David L. Eng in his close examination of Asian American masculinity in its connections to immigration exclusion. David L. Eng demonstrates the many ways in which Asian American males are haunted and constrained by enduring domestic norms of sexuality and race under the diaspora of Asian American literature, particularly in the Western phallus-centric viewpoint. Here I borrow and appropriate this idea to interpret Lamb’s words. See David L. Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America*. London: Duke University Press, 2001.

narrator's "feminine partiality". This ambivalent attitude intriguingly preludes the debate between Elia and his cousin, Bridget. This highlights how chinaware and other oriental goods have moved from the upper-class enjoyment and graced the common household, which not only becomes the most noticeable motif in the essay but more importantly demonstrates the emergence of a new consumer society.

In their discussion of luxury debate in the eighteenth century, Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger explore the imports of these commodities in relation to how they were made, purchased and displayed in the private domestic settings of Britain's urban middling classes. They propose that eastern or oriental commodities were "part of the classical, western definition of luxury". Thus, these items are not daily necessities, but objects that flaunt one's immense fortune and privileged life styles.²⁴³ Precious chinaware or oriental objects are to be kept, exhibited in cabinets of curiosities, and appreciated by a small amount of people, namely rich people from the upper class. As Ken Arnold remarks, from the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, "the trappings of luxury began to reach a wider section of society", and "it was such material novelties that stimulated contemporary debates about luxury".²⁴⁴ Berg and Eger examine the debate about luxury and conclude that it was conducted among "several hundred writers at all levels of eighteenth-century discourse" in all possible genres. They note that, over the course of the eighteenth century, "there was increasingly a distinction made between 'new' and 'old' luxury" as new luxuries were "created out of the division of labour and the expansion of commerce" in contrast to old luxuries which "relied on excessive displays of large bodies of retainers".²⁴⁵ This provides the appropriate context for Bridget and Elia's argument. For Bridget and Elia, their views toward purchasing chinaware are distinctively different. As the character of Bridget appears to be a believer in traditional value system, her consumer ethic (the ethic of the "old luxury") is relatively

²⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 8.

²⁴⁴ Cabinets of curiosities, obviously, were limited to those who could afford and maintain them, especially the aristocracy. From seventeenth century, a number of non-aristocratic individuals used their cabinets of curiosities as a tool for social elevation. And by the middle of seventeenth century, some people "from the lower nobility and upper ranks of middling sort formed a series of significant collections", which showed the collecting of the curiosities was no longer the privilege of upper-class people. See Ken Arnold. *Cabinets for the Curious: Looking Back at Early English Museum*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006.

²⁴⁵ Berg and Eger. p. 9.

conventional. She cannot forget that cheap luxury was once so difficult to obtain, and it was a time when “a purchase is but a purchase”, and they even had to “eye[d] it for weeks” before they could make up their minds to the purchase. Yet in contrast, Elia’s attitude to consumption is rather positive and gleeful; he can even lie back, appreciate and enjoy looking at “merry little Chinese waiter holding an umbrella, big enough for a bed-tester, over the head of that pretty insipid half-Madonna-ish chit of a lady in that very blue summer-house”. To be more specific, what Bridget represents is the earlier phase of consumer culture. But for Elia, as these eastern luxuries are now greatly introduced to common household, the world he seeks to understand does not seem too remote.

In the course of the eighteenth century, luxury was not always considered only about commodities *per se*; more often than not, it was about social behaviours, generated by and in the cities and participated by middling class and upper class alike. And, the definition of luxuries was often received differently by various classes of consumers. In the essay “The Error of Our Ways: Historians and the Birth of Consumer Society”, John Brewer points out that during the eighteenth century, debates about trade and the economy, instead of taking the traditional stance of condemning excessive commodity consumption, started defending the luxury rather than necessity. And it was also during this period of time when “the greater density of goods enabled society’s middle ranks, as well as aristocracy, to shape a labile and changing social identity through the consumption of certain cultural artefacts and services.”²⁴⁶ Although perceived as positive force that helped with the economic growth in a general sense, many economists also worried about the morality of luxury, stating the excessive purchase of luxury might result in not only the abuse of enjoyment but also in a national social problem.²⁴⁷ In “Old China”, the two distinctive consumer ethics show the ambivalent sentiments people had for the luxury in this era. Bridget always reminisces about the good old days when “there was pleasure eating strawberries, before they became quite common—in the first dish of peas, while they were yet

²⁴⁶ John Brewer. “The Error of Our Ways: Historians and the Birth of Consumer Society,” public lecture in the Cultures of Consumption Programme, ESRC/AHRB, 23rd September, 2003, at The Royal Society of London. URL (accessed March 2008): http://www.consume.bbk.ac.uk/working_papers.

²⁴⁷ The main concerns of these writers lay in the distribution of wealth and consumer behaviour of the poor, and eventually the risk of destabilising the society and the economy. See Hundert, pp. 28-40.

dear—to have them for a nice supper, a treat”. She loves the old time when she and Elia “now and then indulge[d] themselves in a cheap luxury”. Bridget represents the people who enjoy the sensuality that the luxury brings. The controlled and reserved love for luxury indicates the enjoyment of some more-than-daily necessities that they can afford, the occasionally excessive but not abusive enjoyment. To people of her sort, luxury marks sheer pleasure. However, to Elia, the introduction of Asian commodities during the seventeenth and the early eighteenth century made it possible for “a broad, but discerning middle class.” Some of these Asian imports were fine luxury, but most of them were “decent high quality semi-luxuries available in a range of patterns, styles, qualities and prices”. The wide range of these eastern goods could thus “appeal to markers ranging from the middling orders of metropolis and province to elite consumers”.²⁴⁸ A wide range of prices mentioned by Berg is a crucial factor that contributes to the different viewpoints and consumer ethics between Elia and Bridget. For Elia, the chinaware was once true rarity, but as the circulation of it grew wider, and with the expansion of the consumer market for luxuries, he sees no wrong with the excessive purchase and enjoyment of them. As Elia reminds Bridget that they “had so much to struggle with” when growing up together, he is reaffirming their present, better socio-economic status. Elia even suggests to Bridget that they must “ride, where [they] formerly walked: live better, and lie softer—and shall be wise to do so—than [they] had means to do in those good old days” that Bridge speaks of. The transition from the good old time that Bridget reminisces to the leisure and pleasure that Elia now enjoys thus marks a change in their social and economic ranks. As aforementioned, the wide range of prices enables these luxuries to reach consumers of different social ranks, and it also defines and responds variously to different consumption behaviours. Hence, in the case of Elia and Bridget, while luxury purchased at different stages of life could mark the social distinction, financial individuality and above all, esteem. “This quiet argument” between Bridget and Elia, though corresponding to the luxury debate in eighteenth century England, appropriately addresses the transition of consumer ethics at their time. In her essay “Empire, Coleridge, and Charles Lamb’s Consumer Imagination”, Karen Fang scrutinises the whole contemporary consumer ethics in Romantic period,

²⁴⁸ Maxine Berg. “New commodities, luxuries and their consumers in eighteenth-century England”. *Consumer and Luxury: Consumer Cultures in Europe 1650-1850*. Eds. Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999, pp. 63-85.

and how it discloses the economic zeitgeist. Fang identifies Bridget's role "as a personification of an older, conservative resistance to luxury consumption". Fang further analyses that:

Bridget's cherished consumer experiences, such as the late-eighteenth-century plays that figure in her reminiscences, are old-fashioned; importantly, these tastes not only date her as a child of the previous generation, but in their outdatedness also implicitly hail the generation that succeeds hers. Indeed, as the younger cousin, Elia personifies a new possibility of consumption without guilt or corruption...Elia, in contrast to Bridget, speaks for a modern sensibility that is attuned to constant stimulation and that revels in the contemporary industrial and imperial economy of surplus and novelty goods.²⁴⁹

Lamb's intentional juxtaposition of Bridge and Elia in "Old China"—instead of elevating one over the other—marks the ambivalence of consumer ethics in his time. As for his personal life, Lamb started his career in South Sea House sometime between 1789 and 1792. In April, 1792, he was appointed clerk in the accountant's office of the East India House, with the commencing salary of £70 annum. For his thirty-three-year service in his position, his salary gradually grew from the modest £70 in the beginning to ten times this amount at his retirement in April, 1825, with a pension of two-thirds of his salary. His handsome salary thus allowed him to afford more luxuries than he could before. With better financial status, Elia/Lamb's enthusiastic consumerism clearly shows his full acceptance of the new consumer ethics and his new-found self-confidence. Bridget/Mary's reserved attitude represents the nostalgia for old times and the concern of morality about luxury. If in the earlier days, the luxuries and the eastern goods were imported and circulated mostly among the rich, it was more difficult for people of the middle or lower class to obtain such chinaware as luxury. Yet, with European manufacturers' consistent effort to imitate, the chinaware became more easily acquired and accessible for common households. In this light, China became more closely associated and identified not as a political entity but more as chinaware. The very idea of "China" was gradually replaced by the concept of china. As chinaware was made cheaper in price, the

²⁴⁹ Fang, p. 818.

socio-economical significance of it gradually gained a stronger presence in common knowledge of things, although in the meanwhile, the geographical importance of China was reduced and trivialised. The alien and the exotic were domesticated, and have become familiar and quotidian. The “Chinese waiter holding an umbrella” at the end of the essay of “Old China” thus holds an interesting position: he symbolises a reconciliation of two consumer ethics when he is no longer the visual shock that Lamb had upon seeing the Tartar man in the urban spectacle; rather, he is this merry little thing that is an agreeable company that bears no strangeness in his domestic life.

Roast Pig and the “Crackling”

Lamb’s another essay, “A Dissertation upon Roast Pig”, is another whimsical work that, like “Old China”, cleverly tailors his imaginary world of China to his life experience. The essay was first published on *London Magazine* on September, 1822, in which Lamb provided a rhapsodically detailed account of the origin of roast pig. The essay starts with a pseudo-oriental folklore from a Chinese manuscript and dramatic comic effect, showing how mankind (Chinamen) “accidentally discovered” the art of roast pig. The use of Chinamen here adds the historicity to the tale, and more importantly, it is a delightful irony that mocks the fact that China was regarded one of the major human civilisations. To enhance the credibility of the story, Elia’s friend M (presumably Thomas Manning) is introduced who “was obliging enough to read and explain” a “Chinese manuscript” to him. This fable describes how a Chinese boy, Bo-bo, accidentally set fire to the cottage, and burnt “new-farrowed pigs” he and his father kept. Attracted by the scent “he had before experienced”, he “stooped down to feel the pig”, and burnt his fingers. The essay goes on

[T]o cool them he applied them in his booby fashion to his mouth. Some of the crums of the scorched skin had come away with his fingers, and for the first time in his life (in the world's life indeed, for before him no man had known it) he tasted -- crackling! Again he felt and fumbled at the pig. It did not burn him so much now, still he licked his fingers from a sort of habit. The truth at length broke into his slow understanding, that it was the pig that smelt so, and the pig that tasted so delicious. (*Works*, II: 138)

The boy's curiosity seduced him to violate the taboo of "eating fire", namely eating cooked food. His indulgent desire of eating was seen to be forbidden when his father, Ho-ti, came back from work and found his son devouring cooked pigs. When his son keenly invited him to have a bite of the burnt pig, Ho-ti was in a greater shock and devastating desperation that his ears "tingled with horror". He then cursed his son and himself for even "beget[ing] a son that should eat burnt pig." While he grasped "the abominable thing", Ho-ti wavered "whether he should not put his son to death for an unnatural young monster." (*Works*, II: 139) Ho-ti's dramatic reactions reflect that eating cooked food of any kind is strictly forbidden in his customs as it is strongly associated with the horror of death. With the story unfolding, the bite of the roast pig is a reminiscence of the fruit of knowledge in *Genesis*, a temptation that Eve and Adam have to fight against. In this sense, Bo-bo's first taste of the roast pig can be compared to Eve's first bite of the fruit of knowledge, while Ho-ti, like Adam, accepts the invitation to join the tempting act. And, just like the forbidden fruit in Eden, the discovery of roast pig unveils the taste of knowledge and civilisation. Upon the "crackling" moment of taste, "both father and son fairly sat down to the mess, and never left off till they had despatched all that remained of the litter". Although the guilt over violating the taboo made the father and son "strictly enjoin not to let the secret escape, the discreet news was still revealed and widely spread out, and "there was nothing to be seen but fires in every direction", creating an age of chaos and anarchy. And this excessively irrational and comical chaos serves as a mockery of the primitive state of Chinese civilisation while it alerts readers to the connotation of immorality and taboo, and more importantly, the biblical sin of gluttony.

The chaotic event is followed by an account of how cooked pigs were eventually acknowledged by the court, and a sage came along with the invented tools to cook pigs, and restored the world to a new order. In Lamb's oriental rhapsody, Bo-bo's accidental ignition not only literally burned down the house and the cottage, it also symbolically burned down the old social restraints, forcing new social orders to be invented and instituted. Although the very taste of roast pig is reminiscent of the biblical fall from Eden, it also suggests a threshold where the knowledge of mankind is initiated and the civilisation is thus established. The sage in the story is portrayed as a philosopher "like our Locke", which not only adds the familiarity and comic effects to the English readers as it addresses one

of the most celebrated characteristics of Chinese civilisation in the eighteenth century, but also hints the rationality and supremacy of the European civilisation. The character of this sage/philosopher thus bears a deeper mockery of Chinese civilisation. Albeit praised by many of European and English predecessors and his contemporaries alike, Chinese civilisation is fundamentally to Lamb a wild, barbarous and relatively primitive culture in need of the European intervention and rationality to pursue the new world orders.

Many critics have argued the sources of this essay of Lamb's. Critics such as Gerald Monsman and many others²⁵⁰ have carefully examined and found Lamb's direct and immediate borrowings from Thomas Morton's *Children in the Wood* (1794)²⁵¹ and Joseph Riston's *An Essay on Abstinence from Animal Food, as a Moral Duty* (1802)²⁵². But as Lamb acknowledged in his letter to Bernard Baron (dated March 11th, 1823), Lamb confirmed that "[t]he idea of discovery of roasting pigs, I...borrowed from my friend Manning" (*Letters* 2: 373).²⁵³ Although it can never be clarified what Chinese tale Manning told Lamb, Manning may have a more obvious influence on this essay. In a letter dated in 1819, Mannig shared his love for pork with Lamb. In this letter, Manning addresses Lamb as "you Londoners" and himself as "seely country folks", and then he exhaustively gives sharp yet humorous contrasts between the city and the country life. Manning proceeds in praise of pigs and pork:

I say if you come to the grosser delights, what can be more delightful than killing a pig? It sounds perhaps like a joke or a paradox, but no such thing. I'm in earnest. A good fat hog—what plenty it makes to *kill one in* to the family! Doesn't it? Besides the regular roasting & boiling pieces, sper rib, grisking, leg & so forth, there's such a variety of odd ends & dainty bits; of preparations, conserves, & picklements;

²⁵⁰ The editor E.V. Lucas noted in the endnotes of "The Dissertation of Roast Pig" that "there has been some discussion as to the origin of the central idea of this essay. Passages in *The Turkish Spy* and Porphyry's tract on *Abstinence from Animal Food*, translated by William Taylor, both bear a likeness to Lamb's passage". See *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*. Ed. E.V. Lucas. 7 Vols. London: Methuen & Co., 1912, pp. 395-396. Also see Gerald Monsman. *Confessions of a Prosaic Dreamer: Charles Lamb's art of autobiography*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1984, p. 157.

²⁵¹ Thomas Morton. *Children in the Wood*. Dublin: Printed for John Rice, 1794

²⁵² Joseph Riston. *An Essay on Abstinence from Animal Foods, as a Moral Duty*. London: printed for Richard Phillips, 1802

²⁵³ Charles and Mary Lamb. *The Letters of Charles and Mary Ann Lamb*. Ed. Edwin W. Marrs, Jr. 3 Vols. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1975.

some of ^{wh} follow inconsistently upon the cry of the pig. For example, the Haslet. Others again surprise you at intervals after a week or a fortnight's suspense, as the petitoes, sausages, &c. Others come forth in the shape of faces, hams, & bacon; & when you've quite forgot the pig—months & months afterwards—make beans grateful—fried eggs a luxury—& veal a treat.

Manning takes delight in both butchering and devouring the pig and is familiar with the edible dainty bits from the animal. What he presents to Lamb is a more rural, practical value of the animal, while Lamb puts his urban twist to this rural delight: he renders the fun to amuse his London readers. The metropolitan epicures may not see the killing as an enjoyment, but they may take pleasure in passing around the juicy bits the essay brings. This again highlights the social divisions with the rise of the middling class in the metropolis: while the rural represents a more primitive form of life, the urban symbolises a more refined life style.

In the other half of “Roast Pig”, Elia tells of a seemingly irrelevant childhood experience. Elia describes his aunt once gave him “a smoking plum cake, fresh from oven” on his way back to school, and out of “the very coxcombry of charity”, he gave a beggar the whole cake when passing the London Bridge. This “school-boy-like” good deed did him no good but brought him the emotional repentance:

[B]ut before I had got to the end of the bridge, my better feelings returned, and I burst into tears, thinking how ungrateful I had been to my good aunt, to go and give her good gift away to a stranger, that I had never seen before, and who might be a bad man for aught I knew; and then I thought of the pleasure my aunt would be taking in thinking that I—I myself, and not another—would eat her nice cake—and what should I say to her the next time I saw her—how naughty I was to part with her pretty present—and the odour of that spicy cake came back upon my recollection, and the pleasure and the curiosity I had taken in seeing her make it, and her joy when she sent it to the oven, and how disappointed she would feel that I had never had a bit of it in my mouth at last—and I blamed my impertinent spirit of alms-giving, and out-of-place hypocrisy of goodness, and above all I wished never to see the face again of that insidious, good-for-nothing, old grey impostor. (*Works*, II: 143)

Elia calls the old beggar “counterfeit” and “imposter” to substitute the blame on himself over his own deed. As the repentant benevolence emerges, his sense of self-sacrifice is expelled, and only the regret remains. Elia’s circumstantial account of what happens to his mind becomes lucid. The sensual pleasure of the plum cake—the odour, the texture, and the visual picture—return in the form of self-blame that haunts his recollection. His desire of gluttony returns and dominates his manners or good conscience. The epicurism cleverly connects two parts of this essay: it projects young Elia’s image onto the portrayal of Bo-bo and the two young boys’ images overlap. And the uncontrollable note of desire for food is shown in both stories. Although the personal anecdote may seem inconsistent with the preceding part, Elia’s repentance, aligned with Bo-bo’s breach of the culinary taboo, stimulate the sense of over-indulgence in the sensual pleasure. In both cases, gluttony is an excessive consumption of food, a concept that correlates to Elia’s obsessive passion and purchase of luxury goods in “Old China”. As the temptation is too strong to keep under, it challenges the restrictions of social norms as well as societal expectation, and would have to be handled in a “bestly fashion”. With the inward animality being externalised, the regression of civility is shown in both cases. Hence, the juxtaposition of ancient China and contemporary England does not conflict; instead, the contrast and the hidden correlation create a comic effect that stirs readers’ empathy and reinforces the guilt over or even the defence for the excess in sensual pleasure. Lamb’s gastronomic writing reassures his self-identification as a materialist in the metropolis. Accordingly, through the site of cultural exchange and interchange, he is able to accommodate the Chinese folklore to the English dining table, and to sew his childhood experience to the fabrication of the tale, which demonstrates his genius and limitation in the dialectical materialism that is simultaneously historical and spatial.

The Material World and the Spatio-Temporal Limits

Lamb’s preoccupation with materiality is a vehicle to serve him as a consolation and a mechanism to work out his constant polarised yet correlative thinking. In other words, the material and the physical which he projects his affections onto often carry the psychological as well as the social significance. Granted, he acknowledges the vile in the expanding metropolis, yet the urbanity of London not only feeds him with the

amazing sights in daily life, but also with the availabilities of material goods. Sometimes through cooperation, and sometimes through conflicts, the metropolitan London creates and provides a social space that affords Lamb's quiet debate over the various aspects of life. The excessive sensual pleasure he pursues in materiality enables him to revise and re-envision the worlds he sees. This, however, could never exceed his limits as a writer; he is trapped in the beguiling locale of London and the bewildering transition of time. Monsman's book *Confessions of a Prosaic Dreamer* probes into the psyche of Lamb and sees the necessity of metropolis as a mechanism to yield from his mother's tragic death and his own traumatic experience. Monsman's sees the necessity for Lamb to invoke the "familiarity of daily life" because it provides "the elusive balance" and "healing illusions of art".²⁵⁴ The juxtaposition of the present and the past, the repetitive discontinuities of the temporal experiences, and the hesitation between the temporal and the perpetual show Lamb's inability to surpass the scope of time, which sets limits to his craftsmanship. This "temporal imperfection" that Lamb has in his writings is, according to Monsman, an incapability to realise the "celestial perfection" that Lamb would like to achieve but fails. For Lamb, he is never able to present to his readers the transcendent visions of the world that many of his contemporaries have. He is not able to see and articulate the purely abstract, imaginary dimensions, for he has to base his recognition and imagination of the world on the physical and concrete things. Although the metropolis grants him many opportunities and occasions for exchange of ideas and cultures, the fast-pacing urban scenes confine his ability to contextualise his visions neither further in the future nor deeper in the past. His measure of time and space is always *now* and *here*, forming a unique aesthetic against the value system of Wordsworth and Coleridge.

Richard Haven borrows Wordsworth's words and compliments Lamb on his ability to produce "[a] simple product of the common day" with his "love and holy passion" for the city.²⁵⁵ Haven sees Lamb as an "altogether smaller talent" than that of Wordsworth and Coleridge, yet he also regards Lamb's art as a kind of literary achievement so comparable of the literary reputation of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Although Lamb too acknowledges his own genius inferior to Wordsworth's and more ideally, Coleridge's, he strives to develop an art form that helps conquer his

²⁵⁴ Monsman. pp. 144-151.

²⁵⁵ Haven, p. 145.

anxieties. Tim Milnes addresses Lamb's anxieties as a strong reaction to "the withdrawal of any hope of imaginative compensation for epistemic loss", like many of his literary colleagues.²⁵⁶ Milnes suggests that Lamb is unable to "live in the absence of certainty", and the lack of true epistemic knowledge creates for Lamb a great deal of anxieties. And these anxieties express "a craving for and a fear of limitation", and Lamb's essays, Milnes proposes, "can thus fruitfully be read as attempt to cope with an epistemological impasse". Lamb's profound nostalgia often revisits "as a kind of epistemic compulsion" while Lamb often finds the daily experience as the most reliable and the primary source of his recognition of things. As Lamb could only dwell in the certainties of things, prose is the most accessible genre that he could feel comfortable writing about, because "[f]or Lamb, the gulf between fact-bound prose and the richer imaginative domains of poetry was not so easily bridged".²⁵⁷ The juxtaposition of the present and the past, and the narrative strategies such as *in medias res* thus entail his awareness of the epistemic and spatio-temporal limitations.

In this sentiment, the writings discussed in this chapter all share a similar quality of Lamb's writings: they mark, more often than not, the transitions of time in the domain of the metropolitan London. And the frequent revisits to the past and childhood memories, along with his heavy dependencies on the realm of reality, highlight his limitations as a writer, which, as a matter of fact, could lend a light onto why Lamb almost leaves a blank page on the topic of China or the Orient. And even if he does, the lack of true epistemic knowledge about things, the spatio-temporal limitations as a writer, or the uneasiness to conquer—or even just to bridge—the poetic genius of Wordsworth or Coleridge, Lamb shows his incompetence to tackle the topic of China or the East to a depth, a width or even the grandeur like his contemporaries do. His writings about c/China thus stay on a very superficial level. In his critique to "Kubla Khan", he sees no practical value and the lack of public interest in Coleridge's fragmental dream vision, neglecting Coleridge's ability to manifest an eastern empire of majestic beauty that once invaded and terrorised Europe and most of Asia at its prime. In his personal correspondences with Manning, he reveals the visual stimulation that builds up his speculation about the East (in this case, East Asia) on the growing racial theories at

²⁵⁶ Milnes, p. 338.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

this time. Asia is simplified and is strongly related to the Tartars. His appeal to Manning discloses his presumption that the East is nothing but a barbarous, heathen land. The sensual and physical descriptions of the Tartar man are used to differentiate the Eurocentric viewpoints and the possible perspectives in Asia. The cannibalism is even more stressed to contrast the high civilisation of Europe. The jobs and the working experience in some of the biggest trading houses do not seem very helpful to his oriental imagination either. In “South-Sea”, the commercial values of the international trades are reduced to the past glory of a trading company, which merely serves as a background image for his reminiscences of old friends. “Old China” replaces the true geographical entity with the fragile and breakable chinaware. His masculinity is endangered when it comes to the passion for chinaware, and is even more at risk when both male and female of the Chinese figures on the chinaware are feminised. China is a world before perspective, an opaque entity in need of Western comprehension and interpretation. The excessive sensual pleasure that eastern luxuries can bring gives rise to the quite debate of the old and new ethics of consumer culture. And the two poles of consumer ethics confront, conflict and eventually compromise with the rise of the middling sort in the metropolis. The exquisite chinaware is domesticated into the common English household with the growing trade with the East and the growing ambition of British Empire. “Roast Pig” is a jolly mockery to the popular myth that China represents a major source of human civilisation, but, as Lamb pens it, a rather primitive state of civilisation with the barbarity of eating raw meat. The age of innocence in this Chinese folklore has to go through a disorderly, chaotic state and then comes to the restoration of social norms with the introduction of good reasoning and a rational Locke-like sage, suggesting the Western civilisation supremacy. Then, the two parts of essays is connected by the overindulgence in the excessive sensual pleasure of eating, but at the same time, as in both cases the narrator *I* and Bo-bo fall from the state of rational merits to an irrational, chaotic, emotional state of mind. Indeed, the essay presents the psyche with a connotation of the regressive civilisation when personal desire is involved. Gluttony, an act of eating more than one should, correlates to the idea of luxury, underlying the recurring theme of luxury debate with the implication of moral defence of it.

In Lamb’s writing, his epistemic ideas and recognitions of the world,

though correlative, also collide. His incapability to project his visions beyond the time and space he was in eventually becomes his defects. Although in many ways, Lamb's prosaic art is no less than Coleridge's or Wordsworth's poetic sensation, he falls short of surpassing the trivial and the superficial level of things as well as entering the grandeur of fantastical imagination, which, as previously discussed, fails to deliver his points of view in a cohesive way. His polarised thinking often shows an assimilation process in a conflicting, paradoxical structure. Like many of his eighteenth-century predecessors, Lamb's oriental writings show ideas of opposites: c/China can be both repulsive (the Tartar man) and exquisite (the chinaware he enquires); it can be charming (the fun of roast-pig eating) and challenging (the regret and repugnance he feels); it can be alien (the world before perspectives) and familiar (the merry little Chinese waiter). However, eventually, the binary thinking will come to terms and adhere within this structure, and settle on his tireless love for materiality and triviality. At best, Lamb delicate, intriguing and refreshing handling of the topic of c/China shows a different side of the Romantic Orientalism idiom.

The aforementioned aspects showed the signatures of Lamb's writings. Although his literary reputation has never been as great as that of Wordsworth or Coleridge, Lamb provides an alternative route to look at the images of c/China at this era. With the power to command the quotidian and secular concerns, Lamb, in his masterful *Elia* essays, suggests a possible re-reading of c/China in this period, as China lost its actual geographical or cultural reference and was rendered nothing but porcelain. Chinaware can be hard in texture, but it can be fragile and easily breakable. Thus, chinaware can be viewed as an object for European consumers to project their imagination to, to carry personal reminiscences, and to afford the transitions of society and class. And with the fad of c/Chinese vogue growing out of fashion, c/China could easily be shattered into small pieces. This particular object provides a material dialectics of both spatial and historical significances. Thus, the significance of c/China is thus made fluid. And since c/China loses its true essence, it falls apart. In the next chapter, De Quincey and his writings on China would demonstrate how images of China are completely overturned: China is neither a philosophical land that could provide a cultural revival nor a fertile ground that bears material abundance. China became the core problem for the Britons in the Far East because of its association with opium. China, like a small portion of opium divided among the European

powers, is devoured both in a figurative and literal sense.

Diction of Addiction: Thomas De Quincey's Questions with Opium and China

In the previous chapter, Charles Lamb's ideas of China are manifested. As the metropolis nurtured him in an unusual way, the cityscape provided him with a vista onto various aspects of life, particularly the perception of materiality and triviality, in relation to chinoiserie. Lamb's contemporary, Thomas De Quincey, also found his connections with the East in metropolitan London. With Lamb's introduction of literary friends, De Quincey soon familiarised himself with many literary and cultural figures in London, such as William Hazlitt and other writers. With London becoming a familiar landscape to De Quincey, the significance of the city grew. In De Quincey's long career as a writer, he contributed a large number of articles to various literary magazines, newspapers, and periodicals, which included *The London Magazine*, *Blackwood's Magazine*, *Edinburgh's Saturday's Post*, and *Tait's Magazine*. But it was in his role as a regular contributor to *The London Magazine* that established his reputation as a writer. *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, for instance, was first published in 1821 in *The London Magazine*. Due to its wide popularity, it was soon published in a book form in 1822, and enjoyed an even bigger success among readers. The popularity of the *Confessions* remained strong for quite some time. For the next thirty years or so, the *Confessions* was still in print on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1856, De Quincey collected his own works, decides to revise previous editions of the *Confessions*, and published a newer, enlarged edition, in order to fit in his full collection of works. This newer edition soon replaced the original one, and became the only text available on the market.

Ever since Thomas De Quincey established his literary fame, he has been regarded controversial, mainly based on the conceived immorality of drug-overuse in *Confessions*. While his blunt confession of drug addiction drew controversy, the autobiographical elements helped attract wide readership. For modern critics, the controversies of De Quincey are far more complex: he has been criticised for self-plagiarising, while his references to many others' works are often derivative and problematic. His literary criticism, the ideas of "literature of knowledge" and "literature of power", leaves readers and critics bewildered, as the distinction of the two

is clearly lacking²⁵⁸. Some writers in De Quincey's defence argue that De Quincey highlights the pain that opium brings in greater length in *Confessions* despite his enthralling introduction to the pleasure of opium. Although it appears immoral to many, his visionary fantasy is unique in its own right, especially in the genre of prose-writing. Besides, although some may argue over his frequent self-plagiarism, some strains of coherence remain strong throughout his works. His extensive reading and writings enable him to waltz from one style to another with ease, making him modern and stylish. Last but not least, even though his literary criticism may have baffled some of his contemporaries, his distinctive aesthetics inspire many later writers, including Charles Baudelaire, Edgar Allen Poe, and Jorge Luis Borges who have all publicly acknowledged direct influences from De Quincey.

In his oeuvre, De Quincey shows his reading and knowledge in a wide range of topics, and it is not difficult to tell that he constantly draws inspiration from Greek and German philosophy and literature. Nevertheless, his writings also demonstrate that he is no stranger to topics about the Orient. Apart from the well-known *Confession* essays, De Quincey has dealt with the topic of the Orient in many essays, such as "The Revolt of the Tartars" in 1837, and he also addresses the problems of opium and China respectively in 1840, 1841, and 1857. However, in his various handlings of China and the Orient, his attitude has become progressively aggressive. Contemporary critics such as Nigel Leask and John Barrell both use psychoanalysis to approach De Quincey's writings and his change of attitudes towards the Orient. And just like opium, the Orient, especially China, is a medium that demonstrates his binary (if sometimes self-contradictory) thinking. In this chapter, a chronological reading of De Quincey's writing with the emphasis on the intersection of metropolitan life and the topic of China is introduced. As London represents a city of material abundance and of convenient access to opium,

²⁵⁸ To De Quincey, "literature of knowledge" showcases the discursive understanding of man, as the "literature of power" appeal to the higher understanding of reasons through affections of pleasure and sympathy. In De Quincey's own words, "the function of the first is to teach; the function of the second is to move." However, even though De Quincey attempts to make such distinctions, he also acknowledges the two should not be "thought of as unequal under the same standard, but as different in kind, and, if otherwise equal, as equal under a different standard...they differ not as better or worse, or simply by more and less; they differ by undecipherable and incommunicable differences". See Thomas De Quincey. *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*. 21 vols. Gen. Ed. Grevel Lindop. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2000-2003. "The Works of Alexander Pope" (DQW16: 387). From now on, DQW.

it also showcases the overwhelming power of urbanity, industrialisation and imperialism to the writer. And, at the interchangeable interface of the private and the public, De Quincey tries to accommodate his identity in the drug and the city. And along the way, his animus towards China has grown more severe, and China is modelled as a counter force to the Englishness, and is separated out from other oriental strands in his writing.

“The Mighty Labyrinths of London”

When it comes to De Quincey’s ideas of the East, *Confessions* is undoubtedly the most celebrated work dealing with his long-term intriguing and ambivalent triangular relationship among the drug, the geography and himself. It is thus crucial to contextualise his notions of the Orient in the *Confessions* essays. The *Confessions* consists of two main parts, and each part contains several minor sections. Part One contains “To the Reader” and “The Preliminary Confessions”, while Part Two contains a brief introduction, “The Pleasure of Opium”, “Introduction to the Pains of Opium”, and “The Pains of Opium”. While Part One gives readers full, detailed introductory information of “the English Opium-Eater”, Part Two focuses more on the first-hand drug-use experiences. In Part One, the narrator reveals his miserable homeless life experience in London, and gives readers a hint of how the psychological and emotional stress of the writer at such a young age would contribute to the drug use in Part Two, underlining the cohesion of these two parts.

In Part One, London without any question plays a significant part. The narrator starts his narrative framework by referring himself as a “scholar”, a “philosopher” and an “intellectual creature”. These identities allow him to justify his “pursuits of pleasures” in taking opium with “a religious zeal” and set him apart from other “amateur” opium-eaters. The narrator exposes a wide population in England who took opium not for medical treatment but for recreational use, including low-wage labourers and men of “distinguished talents or of eminent station”. The narrator’s intention here is to enhance the credibility of his writings, and at the same time, alerts his readers with the fact that even the work-people in Manchester were “rapidly getting into the practice of opium eating” because “the lowness of wages [...] would not allow them to indulge in ale or spirits”. (DQW 2: 11)²⁵⁹. This not only divulges how affordable opium grew at this

²⁵⁹ “Recollections of Charles Lamb.” (DQW10: 76)

time, but it also shows that the habitual use of opium was not restricted to metropolitan London alone; it actually reached a national scale. With the recreational consumption of opium growing rapidly, the narrator implicitly raises his worries that the pain of opium would consume the nation. This also adds to the confessions in Part Two a depth by widening the perspective beyond the personal.

Although in *Confessions*, opium is often cited and used as the epitome of De Quincey's oriental writings, it is meaningful to him not because of his patriotic concerns, but because of his personal experiences. In "Preliminary Confessions", the author describes in great detail how he was brought up as a prestigious intellectual but ended up living miserably in London at his late teens. While London grew industrialised and urbanised, it started his life-long sufferings with physical ailments, psychological stress and opium. While the city represents a want of daily necessities, London to him becomes a city of vice, unlike Lamb's amiable depiction. The thrills and excitement in kaleidoscopic London in Lamb's depiction is gone, and what is left to see in London for De Quincey is only a city whose many scenes are full of "intrigues and complex chicanery". From here, De Quincey starts to associate London with negative sentiments, paving the way for his downfall with opium. In his endless loneliness in the metropolis, he depended heavily on the kindness of strangers, among whom two people were of particular significance: one anonymous girl and Ann of Oxford Street. The former triggered his insecurity and caused his insomnia, whereas the latter offered him not only physical companionship but also nothing less than unconditional, motherly love. Since the living conditions in London were "harsh, cruel, and repulsive" (DQW2: 25), the high anxiety produced horrendous dreams, which eventually weakened his physical strength. These physical discomforts also added up to his psychological angst. With his emotions springing outward, the haunted space moved inward, and the bleak house he shared with the nameless girl became a domestic exchange for the unnamed sense of stress from exterior and the unspoken sense of terror from the interior. As a result of the interchangeable distress, it inspired the author's wanderlust in non-domestic scenes and preluded his drug addiction.

In *Confessions*, De Quincey's constant and various usages of anonymity are his strategy to accuse London of its mercilessness as an expanding metropolis. As the domestic scenes became unbearable, his wanderlust

drove him out to seek energy and companionship. After parting with the nameless girl, the narrator was joined by Ann of Oxford Street in his aimless night cruises in the metropolis, and her immeasurable kindness was “greater than [he] could ever have repaid her”. Ann “stretch[ed] out a saving hand” to him “at this crisis of [his] fate” when the author was psychologically isolated and physically debilitated. The companionship of Ann became essential to him at that particular time not only because of the implicit physical intimacy they shared but also because of the mutual emotional dependence as companions. Due to the companionship, the inner, psychological realm is transferred to the outer, physical space, and Ann’s self-sacrificial deeds meant true humanity to him, which by contrast highlights the mercilessness of the city. Because of the companionship, Ann was elevated from a lowly back-alley streetwalker to a noble figure. And unlike most of the author’s companions in the city, Ann was named, which shows her special status in the author’s mind. Nonetheless, unfortunately, after his journey out of the city to seek financial assistance, Ann was nowhere to be found upon the author’s return to the city, signifying the loss of human contact in the presence of the overwhelming power of the mighty metropolis. With the metropolis peaking its high urbanisation, industrialisation, and accordingly, social classification, people of the lower socio-economic status were destined to be drowned in it. The author blamed his incapability to trace Ann on his “limited” knowledge of London and the extent of ability in the presence of “the mighty labyrinths of London” (DQW2: 35). In the last paragraph of “The Preliminary Confessions”, the author seems to eventually reconcile himself to the loss of Ann, and comes to terms with London. As he was “again in London and pace[s] the terraces of Oxford Street by night”, he was “oppressed by anxieties that demand all [his] philosophy” to support him. London for him is now an occasion for him to recollect his “youthful ejaculation of anguish” (DQW2: 41). However, the author’s pacification with the city was only temporary while a sense of isolation still persisted. He demanded a stronger support system to provide him the emotional dependency. The drug, in the ensuing section, easily replaces and substitutes for human companionship.

In the next section “The Pleasures of Opium”, the author introduces his first acquaintance with opium, and thus starts his confessions. It is noteworthy that the author’s first use of the drug was solely for medical reason: to ease his headache and toothache. Yet accidentally, like a

revelation, the author was stunned by the power, exclaiming “Opium! dread agent of unimaginable pleasure of pain!”, and felt “a mystic importance attached to the minutest circumstances connected with the place and time and the man that first laid open to [him] the Paradise of Opium-eaters” (DQW 2: 42). Opium has certainly opened up his vision, and on a symbolic level, the absence of Ann is officially substituted by the presence of the drug. The low-priced and widely-affordable drug is elevated to elixir, which is similar to the depiction of Ann, a social outcast exalted to a female figure of supreme being. As Ann evokes the author’s awareness from psychological to physical level, opium makes these two aspects cohere. The “celestial drug” suppressed the negative effects and the bodily pains, and opened to him like “in the abyss of divine enjoyment thus suddenly revealed” (DWQ2: 43). The new-found partnership with opium enhanced the writer’s confidence, giving him a sense of superiority to walk among the poor on Saturday evenings after the use of the drug. Opium empowered him as he “drew from opium some means of consoling”. As “opium can overrule all feelings into compliance with the master-key”, it drove him to map the city through walking:

Some of these rambles led me to great distances, for an opium-eater is too happy to observe the motion of time; and sometimes in my attempts to steer homewards...instead of circumnavigating all the capes and head-lands I had doubled in my outward voyage, I came suddenly upon such knotty problems of alleys, such enigmatical entries, and such sphynx’s riddles of streets without thoroughfares...I could almost have believed at times that I must be the first discoverer of some of these *terrae incognitae*, and doubted whether they had yet been laid down in the modern charts of London. (DQW2: 50)

The city proved to be a great unknown for the author, and the endless wandering in the wilderness of the city seemed to make the “*terrae incognitae*” even greater. The author reiterated his losing track of time in the overwhelming power of space. The uncharted, labyrinth-like space of the metropolis posed simultaneously amazement and intimidation to the author, which may come from the drug-induced state, but again, with the aid of opium, his confidence and selfhood were boosted immensely, enabling him to counteract the ever-expanding cityscape. With the intention to privatise it, the author wished to claim his discovery in the

uncharted London. This can be regarded as a parallel to the growth of the British Empire and colonialism overseas. Thus, although it is seemingly impossible to accurately remake the route map of De Quincey's night cruises, it is sensible to assume that East London, rather than other parts of the city, was the author's constant haunt, because from the beginning of the nineteenth century, East London was populated by under-privileged people, especially the working class. The author's constant wandering among the poor, and the fact he specified that he had to "baffle the audacity of the porters" and "the intellect of the hackney coachmen" (DQW2: 50) showed De Quincey's close geographical relationship with East London. The author also explained that the "*terrae incognitae*" was in the vast undeveloped, underdeveloped or the developing parts of East London, a part that has yet been laid down in the modern charts of London. This was exactly why even though East London appeared to be the author's constant haunt, yet he still got lost in it. The author felt the feeling of perplexities "moral or intellectual": his identity as an intellectual allowed him to illuminate the families of lower class in the slum area of the metropolis, yet on a conscious, moral level, the author was very much indebted to the poor because of his superiority over them in order to reconfirm his identity. More intriguingly, De Quincey described that the "human face" that he saw in the ghetto "tyrannised" over his dreams many years later, as readers of *Confessions* know of, this may refer to the haunting image of the Malay in "The Pains of Opium". Admittedly, it is probably an overstatement to suggest that De Quincey intentionally used the expansion of East London as the epitome of the expansion of the British Empire in the Far East, yet historically there was a correlation between East London and the East. That is, if the growing of the metropolis can be viewed as an emblem of the British Empire expanding overseas, East London, as a naval connection between River Thames and the canal system, witnessed a developing inland establishment not only for low-paid employees in the docks²⁶⁰ but also for sailors, crews, foreign traders, and eventually, immigrants. Apart from its connection with world trades, East London was very much the home for underprivileged people and a high level of poverty, and, in the course of the nineteenth century, became the hotbed of crimes and diseases²⁶¹, the seemingly analogical

²⁶⁰ In the first decade of the nineteenth century, West India Docks and East India Docks were both built in East London, making East London a pivot to connect the overseas trades and inland transportation.

²⁶¹ By the second half of the nineteenth century, with the growing population of Chinese

characteristics to De Quincey's later depictions of the East and China. Therefore, the author's aspiration to claim the uncharted parts of London may refer to a greater imperial ambition abroad. Thus, this is not only a process to explore the unknown but also an intention to domesticate the foreignness. However, as the author made the claim, as he himself would acknowledge, he was under the influences of intellectual and moral guilt: he was too aware of his overdependence on the lower class to claim his intellectual superiority, and at the same time, there was a strong sense of guilt forming while he did so. Analogically, the similar sentiments occurred when the British Empire was aware of its dependences on the lower states of their colonies to claim its economic and martial superiority, yet at the same time, there existed a sense of imperial guilt.²⁶² The moral and intellectual perplexities can also be seen as the thesis in the ensuing "Pains of Opium", and the complex guilt finally resulted in his hypochondriacal melancholy

The Tempting and the Tainted

The inarticulate perplexities demonstrate the author's anxiety not only about himself but also about the outer world. As a result, while the drug and the city become more inseparable, the author is caught up in the knot of the two. His binary thinking starts to emerge and develop and more often than not, it appears self-contradictory. The sensual pleasures are necessary but evil; the foreign can be addressed and approached locally; and the opium, instead of producing "inactivity or torpor", can empower him to conquer the great unknown of the city. Although De Quincey has sought tirelessly to outline hierarchical divisions between two sets of confronting values, he repeatedly blurs the boundaries and makes them interchangeable, particularly when the topic is associated with opium. And the spectrum of distinctions is less definite and is less definable. Thus, the

people, the East End was far more frequently associated with opium dens and opium-smoking. Later nineteenth century novels or short stories often saw opium dens in East London as a mysterious and dangerous neighbourhood. For example, in Charles Dickens' unfinished novel, *Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), an opium den is used as a critical element of the story. Oscar Wilde's *Portrait of Doran Gray* (1890) and Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Man with the Twisted Lip" (1891) also use opium dens to add to its mysterious elements. See Barry Milligan. "'It Begins with the Chinese, but Does Not End with Them': Opium Smoking and the Orientalized Domestic Scene in England." in *Pleasures and Pains: Opium and the Orient in Nineteenth-Century British Culture*. Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1995. Also see Anne Witchard. *Thomas Burke's Dark Chinoiserie*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009.

²⁶² See Nigel Leask. *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empires*. Cambridge: CUP, 2004.

same drug can bring him both pleasures and pains; the public is needed but at the same time, it collectively poses an oppression to him; the city can be heartless while it provides him with the kindest human companion; the local expansion of the city can be compared to the imperial expansion afar; and, more specifically, the inside can be made outside, the psychological physical, the self the other, and the familiar foreign. All in all, the absolute hierarchical distinctions are dissolved and melted into air like the opium smoke.

Followed by the pleasures of opium, the lengthy confession of the pains of opium appears the most intriguing part of this highly-autobiographical work. It is noteworthy that as soon as the writer begins “The Pains of Opium”, the scenes have turned private and domestic again. In the domestic scenes, the author’s occasional, recreational use of opium has grown into daily usage because of his worsening stomach-ache. The most famous (and notorious) visionary fantasy he has is his encounter with a Malay²⁶³. As the writer wonders “[w]hat business a Malay could have transact amongst English mountains”, the Malay’s unexpected visit gives the author as well as his household a surprising bewilderment. The maid who opened the door was a young English girl “born and bred amongst the mountains, who had never seen an Asiatic dress of any sort”. The Malay’s “turban therefore confounded her not a little”. As neither spoke the other’s language, “there seemed to be an impassable gulf fixed between all

²⁶³ No positive evidence is there to prove how much De Quincey knew about Malaysia when creating such a character. However, in terms of commercial and colonial expansion, Malacca on the Malay Peninsula and Batavia (now Jakarta) on Java have grown their importance during 1770 and 1830. In 1786, as the East India Company sought a commercial base in South-East Asia, the Sultan of Kedah promised the company to acquire Penang and island off the Malay coast in exchange of the British protection against the Siamese invasion. The Company used this area to perform their commercial activities until they acquired Singapore in 1819. Apart from this, in Johann Friedrich Blumenbach’s popular *De generis humani varietate native* (1795), he divides the races to five main categories, explaining that “Mongolian” and “Ethiopian” represent “the remotest extremes” from “Caucasian”, with “American” and “Malay” falling somewhere in between. This suggests that “the Malay” is coined as a race between the civilized and the barbaric, which might give De Quincey a more substantial evidence to use “Malay” as a semi-civilised race, making his character more plausible. Another possibility that De Quincey uses a Malaysian wanderer is because since the mid-eighteenth century—particularly after the Battle of Plassey in 1756—the British East India Company gained political and military powers in India, British Orientalists had moved their research interest away from China to India and the South Sea. De Quincey’s choice of “Malay” might be a conscious decision that can illustrate the shift of contemporary British interest and ambition from China to Southeast Asia. For colonial expansion, see Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson. *Travels, Explorations and Empires: Writings From the Era of Imperial Expansion, 1770–1835*. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2001. Vol 2: pp. vii- viii. For racial thinking at this age, see Michael Keevak’s *Becoming Yellow: a Short History of Racial Thinking*. New Jersey: Princeton University, 2011, p. 68.

communication of ideas, if either party had happened to possess any”, which generates an unnamed threat:

And a more striking picture there could not be imagined than the beautiful English face of the girl, and its exquisite fairness, together with her erect and independent attitude contrasted with the sallow and bilious skin of the Malay, enamelled or veneered with mahogany by marine air, his small, fierce, restless eyes, thin lips, slavish gestures and adorations [...] He worshipped me in a most devout manner, and replied in what I suppose was Malay. (DQW2: 56)

The author draws a sharp comparison between the English maid and the Malay seaman: the maid represents English merits and the Malay an intrusion, an alien force into the English domestic scene. In spite of the impossible and impassable mutual communication, it is the English values that could remain “erect and independent” in such a situation with the Malay being “slavish”. As an English master, he is “worshipped...in a most devout manner”, and he has the power to “suppose” the language as Malaysian without actually understanding it. At the Malay’s departure, the author gave him a piece of opium, as he assumed that the Malay, as “an Orientalist”, must “be familiar” with opium, and the Malay’s facial expression “convinced” him that it was. However, the author was “struck” with upon seeing the Malay eat the opium “at one mouthful”. This unusual act of the Malay gave rise to his consternation because

The quantity was enough to kill three dragoons and their horses, and I felt some alarm for the poor creature [...] He took his leave, and for some days I felt anxious, but as I never heard of any Malay being found dead, I became convinced that he was used to opium, and that I must have done him the service I designed by giving him one night of respite from the pains of wandering. (DQW2: 57-58)

The narrator’s astonishment is inevitably two-dimensional: he is not only struck by the Malay’s act, but also by his own presumption. As soon as the Malay took his leave, the sense of being intruded was gone for the author, although it left him feeling “anxious”. The Malay’s unexpected intrusion into the English domain offended the author since he felt the necessity to defend the Englishness that his household represents. But the defence was

soon shaken by the Malay's strange behaviour, which not only posed a potential death threat to the Malay's life but also produced a strong sense of guilt to himself. To lessen his own guilt, the author convinces himself that the Malay is "used to opium", and that he sends the Malay "one night of respite from the pains of wandering". This defensive mechanism is exercised only to rationalise the author's and the Malay's unusual behaviours, and cleverly summarises the intertwining relationship between the colonist and the colonised: the colonist builds up his own assumption about the colonised, deprives the colonised of their own voice, and then justifies the misconceptions if any occur at the cultural shock.

In this light, the guiltier the speaker feels, the more anxiety is shown, as the anxiety and the cultural superiority is inseparable. As a result of this, the more the author attempts to deny it, the more he is troubled by it. This subtly echoes to his intellectual and moral perplexities in the previous section. The author then acknowledges that this Malay "brought other Malays with him, worse than himself, than ran 'a-muck' at me, and led me into a world of troubles". (DQW2: 58) Later, the author elaborates on his troubled "oriental dreams". (DQW2: 71) As "the Malay has been a fearful enemy for months," the author felt "the unimaginable horror which these dreams of Oriental imagery and mythological tortures impressed upon [him]." The author "[had] been every night...transported into Asiatic scenes" by the nightmares and the effects of opium, and there he saw "all creatures, birds, beasts, reptiles, all trees and plants, usages and appearances" in "tropical heat and vertical sunlights" that he assembled "in China or Indostan". His nightmare soon leads him to another jump from the Far East to the Near East:

From kindred feelings, I soon brought Egypt and all her goods under the same law. I was stared at, hooted at, grinned at, chattered at, by monkeys, by parroquets, by cockatoos. I ran into pagodas, and was fixed for centuries at the summit or in secret rooms: I was the idol; I was the priest; I was worshipped; I was sacrificed [...] I had done a deed...which the ibis and the crocodile trembled at. I was buried for a thousand years in stone coffins, with mummies and sphynxes, in narrow chambers at the hearts of eternal pyramids. I was kissed, with cancerous kisses, by crocodiles. (DQW2: 71)

This visionary passage allows readers to probe into the author's psyche.

The intriguing and the mysterious atmosphere “filled [him] with such amazement at the monstrous scenery that horror seemed absorbed for a while in sheer astonishment.” However, “[s]ooner or later came a reflux of feeling that swallowed up the astonishment, and left [him] not so much in terror as in hatred and abomination of what [he] saw” (DQW2: 71). As the author identifies himself with opium, the opium is internalised by the drug-user, and he is materialised and possessed by the drug. As he consumes opium, the drug devours him eventually. During this process of the author’s self-accommodation, the Malay’s intrusion as an alien force is even fortified by the side effects of opium. The horrific dream fantasies in the Orient represent his fear, and the hatred and the abomination he suffers are the silent acknowledgement of his addiction and his rage over the weakness of his body and his will power. In the meanwhile, by displaying and associating numerous exotic oriental images, the author materialises the Orient; he downgrades and mixes images from different parts of the Orient to serve the purpose of his twisted nightmares.

In the process of interchange between his binary concepts, De Quincey’s complex becomes more lucid. As he remarks that he is “the idol” and “the priest”, “the worshipped” and “the sacrificed”, the contrasts and the contradictions are all *in* him and *of* him. In other words, he is the matrix of his own self-contradictions. John Barrell points out in his book *The Infections of Thomas De Quincey*²⁶⁴ that “in De Quincey’s writing, there is often a particular process or scheme of displacement at work, one which suggest that a simple binary model, of self and the other, might not always be adequate for thinking about the uses and dangers of the oriental to the western imagination”. Within De Quincey’s “apparently exhaustive binary” thinking, Barrell argues that

[T]here is a self, and there is an other, and inside and an outside, and above and below. The self is constituted by the other, and it requires that other to mark out its own limit, its own definition: yet the two are implacably hostile, and their confrontation appears unavoidable, for there is no third term, no other identity conceivable, nowhere else to go.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ John Barrell. *The Infection of Thomas De Quincey: a Psychopathology of Imperialism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p.10.

De Quincey's formula writing is, as Barrell concludes, a mode of "this/that/the other". As the first two might be sometimes contradictory to each other, in the process of confrontation and negotiation, however, the distinctions between the first two will come to terms, particularly when the third force—the other—arises. And "the other" here is an "absolute other", an alien force used to accommodate the process of self-reconciliation. Barrell points out that in De Quincey's writings, "the other" often refers to the Orient, which is "equally threatening" to "this" and "that", and it "enables and obliges them to reconcile their difference".²⁶⁶ Barrell cites Spivak and argues that this formula in De Quincey's writing has "its historical equivalent in British imperial policy or the policy of the East India Company".²⁶⁷ In Barrell's idea, "the other" is created in order to decrease the differences between and to diminish the forces of "this" and "that", which is exactly how the British manipulated other countries in its imperial expansion. Even though Barrell's argument seems persuasive, the Orient, however, is not thoroughly "the other" to De Quincey in his repertoire. Particularly in De Quincey's early writings, the Orient is "that", a "consolidating other", but not necessarily an "absolute other". In many cases, the Orient is a part of his own identity, which is exactly the part of an estranged self that he intends to oppress. The case of the Malay is one good example. To the author, the Malay intrudes into his English domain both on a physical level (household) and on an abstract level (dreams). The probable death of the Malay results in the author's untamed and unnamed anxieties. But in the following visionary fantasies, not only the author is *in* these oriental imaginaries, but also he *becomes* the oriental figures that he creates. In other words, these dreams are unsettling because he is part of the dreams, which is the reason why he cannot easily abandon his nightmares. He internalises these exterior forces and alien images, and identifies himself with these non-English characters. And in this process, there is no such thing as "the other" to accommodate "this" and "that". This can further explain why he is an English opium-eater, not an opium-smoker or an opium-consumer. After all, it is the Malay who actually *eats* the opium, not the author. It is clear to see how the author identifies himself with the Malay.

In the process of self-accommodation, the mechanism of binary thinking is consistent in De Quincey's writings, and it is especially explicit in the

²⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.11.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 13

previously mentioned concepts of “literature of knowledge” and “literature of power”, and his constant self-contradictions. The critic Charles J. Rzepka comments that “De Quinceyan ‘power’ represents a late Romantic efflorescence of the eighteenth-century literary or rhetorical sublime...in the writings of Longinus, Burke and Kant.”²⁶⁸ Rzepka further explains that De Quincey’s idea of “power” is “areferential”, and “an epiphenomenal or supralinguistic effect”. Among the philosophers Rzepka mentions, De Quincey’s sense of “the sublime” can be best illustrated using Burke’s concept. Burke’s emphasis on the negative effect of the sublime makes him distinctive from the other two, and is most relevant to our understanding to De Quincey’s writings. Burke stresses that the sublime is “alienating and diminishing”, and possesses an overwhelming power. Burke explains:

[But] as pain is stronger in its operation than pleasure, so death is in general a much more affecting idea than pain; because there are very few pains, however exquisite, which are not preferred to death; nay, what generally makes pain itself, if I may say so, more painful, is, that it is considered as an emissary of this king of terrors. When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience.²⁶⁹

De Quincey’s *Confessions* thus adheres to Burke’s ideas. As pleasure and pain are of the same origin, they coexist and are inseparable. London can be charming and can be filled with night-time entertainment while it can also be life-threatening. Opium can be a heavenly elixir that removes all pains while generating some of the worst nightmares. The juxtaposition of pain and pleasure is complex and intriguing, because the correlation of the two produces an unknown power. As the author is overwhelmed by both the metropolis and the drug, he has to confront the power of the unknown. The uncharted map of London is exciting but dangerous to the night-cruiser, while the secret happiness of opium can turn out to be lethal. The unknown is a momentum beyond comprehension, and it is not susceptible to analysis, which echoes what De Quincey defines as “the

²⁶⁸ Charles J. Rzepka. “The Literature of Power and the Imperial Will: De Quincey’s Opium War Essays”. *South Central Review*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Spring, 1991), pp. 37-45

²⁶⁹ Edmund Burke. *A Philosophical Enquiry*. Oxford: OUP, 1990.

literature of power”, as it is eventually a power that transcends the territory of reasoning. To put it simply, the unknown *is* the sublime, which is at the same time delightful and deadly. The “Asiatic scenes” are also a complex to the author. In his hallucinating dream visions, the Orient is yet again a land unknown; it is unknown to him for very different reasons. The Orient is not intelligible because these cultures are all alien to him with their languages very difficult to comprehend, although the author does not necessarily feel the need to understand or differentiate. China, India, Egypt and Malaya are of no distinction to him, and the Orient as a whole is over-simplified. Every oriental image in De Quincey’s dream vision is fragmented, and is assembled to create the exotic but over-awing atmosphere towards which he feels both “loathing and fascinate[ion]”. In this light, the Orient is both grotesque and beautiful, and is the sublime to De Quincey.

The sublime generated by opium is not entirely a novelty. Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan: A Vision in a Dream” and De Quincey’s *Confessions* both deal with the hallucination and the sublime after the use of opium, although they bear quite different footings. While “Kubla Khan” depicts the grandeur of the Tartar Empire of a sublime beauty beyond reach, *Confessions* demonstrates the struggle between the pleasure and the pain of opium, a fall from grace in terms of the effects of opium in particular. In Coleridge’s writing, the exotic geography is extended with the power of the drug, and it devises to recapture the unutterable magnificence of an eastern empire. In De Quincey’s writing, however, the Orient is associated with opium, representing an intruding force that attributes to his nightmare. As both works share the sensual pleasure of opium which brings the writers indefinite inspiration and confidence to not only commend the imaginative excellence and the personal genius but also create the heavenly bliss. “Kubla Khan” is ultimately a poetic work that bears a more specific cultural signifier and geographical locale, and *Confessions* is more of a prosaic work that focuses on the guilty feelings of an individual as well as a growing empire. Frederick Burwick cites John Livingstone and sorts out the possible sources that Coleridge might have read prior to the composition of his work which includes numerous entries of travel writings available at his time.²⁷⁰ *Confessions*, on the other hand, shows

²⁷⁰ “The poem had some of its most important imaginative sources in books such as Samuel Purchas’s *Purchas, His Pilgrimage* (1613), James Bruce’s *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* (1790), and Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Letters Written during a Short*

less of references but more of direct, personal and private infection and affection. The horrific images in De Quincey's nightmares are thus raw, fantastical, original, and unique, but at the same time, they do not bear specific cultural significances like "Kubla Khan" does.

In this sense, in *Confessions*, the Orient is significant not because of its true essence but because of its close association with opium, just like London in his writings. De Quincey seeks exhaustively to domesticate and romanticise the exotic drug. Thus, the Orient, as the author pens it, is an undifferentiated, homogenised, fictional and imaginary space for his growing anxiety. To modern critics, De Quincey's Orient is a displacement of his anxiety that functions in many different levels. John Barrell believes that De Quincey's fears for the Orient are displacements of "some primal and private terror", and of his anxieties "about the Jacobinical tendencies of 'mass society' and the British working classes, or 'urban poor', of the early nineteenth century."²⁷¹ Nigel Leask, tracking down the medical and psychopathological routes, examines fully De Quincey's uses of opium in relation to his physical pains, and he pursues opium as De Quincey's substituted self identity. Leask proposes that "De Quincey's declaration of the inappropriateness of guilt" is "legitimized by his belief that the cruder nervous systems of inferior races, whilst depriving them of any refined *enjoyment* of opium, afforded them a far higher tolerance to the drug's deleterious effects."²⁷² Eventually, Leask sees De Quincey's "apologia for opium" is "an apologia for imperialism as a means of stimulating a torpid and internally fissured national culture, and of displacing domestic anxieties onto the oriental Other".²⁷³ Leask's account coincides with Barrell's explanatory model of De Quincey's writing, and concludes that the great anxiety of De Quincey's dream is thus "precisely one of *orientalization*" as "[i]mperialist and oriental subjects" are inseparable because 'conquest is the prelude to revenge and degeneracy'.²⁷⁴ Leask also seeks to excavate De Quincey's attempt to conquer Coleridge's influence in terms of opium, and parallels the two's intertwining power relation on this particular topic with the use of psychoanalysis. With

Residence in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark (1796)." For more references, see Frederick Burwick. *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. (Oxford: OUP, 2009)

²⁷¹ Barrell, p. 23.

²⁷² Nigel Leask. *British Romantic Writers and the East: The Anxieties of Empire*. Cambridge: CUP, 1992, p. 215.

²⁷³ Leask, p. 171.

²⁷⁴ Leask, p. 228.

opium deeply implicated in British colonial activities in the East in the nineteenth century, these discussions are insufficient, as they fail to address more explicitly De Quincey's socio-economic concerns in his later writings about the triangular relationship among British economy, China and opium, especially when De Quincey tirelessly takes on opium-related issues as the Opium Wars occurred.

Although Leask's treatise neglects De Quincey's primary concerns of British economy, his critiques that De Quincey sees the oriental countries as inferior races are rightfully depicted. At the end of the eighteenth century, and the beginning of the nineteenth century, the perceptions about races and nations were greatly debated. Michael Keevak's book, *Becoming Yellow*, follows the development of ideas about races and racial distinctions at the turn of the century. The concepts of racial distinctions, Keevak argues, did not emerge in most of the earliest Western readings of East Asia; rather, they came into being with the developments and interventions of anthropological, scientific and medical theories, particularly while they were associated with the Mongolian race.²⁷⁵ In accord with Keevak, Peter J. Kitson also proposes that De Quincey's representations of the Orient are "less involved with the psychopathology of its originator, and more concerned to view them as an idiosyncratic and personalised intensification of an increasingly biological nineteenth-century racial discourse of the East".²⁷⁶ Kitson also considers that in Romantic era, anthropology and science, along with the development of theology and philosophy, paved the way for the biologically essentialist notions of distinctions in Victorian racial thoughts. Accordingly, the significances of racial perception and distinction cannot be overlooked in De Quincey's take on the interrelations among China, opium, and the expansion of British Empire and imperialism.

Sinophobia and Xenophobia

The racial distinctions and biased perception of races, as they emerged in

²⁷⁵ Keevak examines carefully the ideas of races from the eighteenth century to modern times, with special focus on how Europeans prescribed and categorised Asian races. Keevak argues the association with the Mongolian races in the nineteenth-century medical treatises bore strong and decisive significances in terms of Western perception of Eastern complexion. See Michael Keevak. *Becoming Yellow: a Short History of Racial Thinking*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011.

²⁷⁶ Peter J Kitson. *Romantic Literature, Race, and Colonial Encounter*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. pp 175-213.

the nineteenth century, extend their influences on De Quincey's political essays. Notably, these essays take on opium-related topics with special focus on the affairs in the Orient in relation to British imperialism. Two years after *Confessions* was published, in April, 1824, in the *London Magazine*, De Quincey published his translation of Immanuel Kant's work, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764). His translation, "Kant on National Character", only focuses on the fourth section of this work, known as "Of the National Characteristics". Kant draws comparisons among various countries, in which he sees "the Arabs" as "the Spaniard of the Orient", and "Persians" as "the French of Asia" while the Japanese could be "regarded as the Englishmen". Kant continues to opine:

What trifling grotesqueries do the verbose and the studied compliments of the Chinese contain! Even their paintings are grotesque and portray strange and unnatural figures such as are encountered nowhere in the world. They also have venerable grotesqueries because they are of very ancient custom, and no nation in the world has more of these than this one.²⁷⁷

Kant, as one of the prominent philosophers in his time, is not impressed by stagnant Chinese civilisation, as opposed to the general contemporaries' favourable views about China: China is "unnatural". Kant gives an example in the footnote that "[i]n Pekin they [the Chinese] still carry on the ceremony, in an eclipse of the sun or moon, of driving away with a great noise the dragon that wants to devour these heavenly bodies; and thus they preserve a miserable custom from the most ancient times of ignorance, although they are now so much better informed".²⁷⁸ Heavily affected by Kant's view, in his translation, De Quincey cunningly includes this footnote in the main body and rephrases Kant's work. He writes:

If we throw a hasty glance over the other quarters of the world, we find the Arabs the noblest of the East, but of a temperament in respect to taste which tends to be barbaresque and the unnaturally romantic [...] If the Arabs are as it were the Asiatic Spaniards, the Persians are the Asiatic Frenchmen [...] The Japanese may be regarded partially

²⁷⁷ Immanuel Kant. *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*. Trans, John T. Goldthwait. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960. pp 109-110.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

as the Englishmen of the Oriental world [...] The nations of India discover a domineering taste for fooleries of that class which run into the barbaresque [...] What senseless fooleries are involved in the prolix and elaborate compliments of the Chinese! Even their paintings are senseless, and exhibit marvellous forms that are nowhere to be seen in nature. They have also, more than any people on earth besides, traditional fooleries that are consecrated by ancient usage; such for instance as the ceremony still retained at Pekin, during an eclipse of the sun or the moon, of driving away the dragon that is attempting to swallow up those heavenly bodies,—a ceremony derived from the elder ages of grossest ignorance, and still retained in defiance of better information. (DQW4: 156-157)

These two texts juxtaposed here can display many interesting differences between Kant's original text and De Quincey's translation. By including the footnote in the main text, De Quincey lengthens the portion on China, laying more emphasis on China in comparison to the "hasty glances" over other Asiatic countries, despite Kant's equal treatment of each country. More importantly, De Quincey's translation is hardly loyal to the original text, not only in his choice of words but also in the conception in general. As Kant's thematic concern still remains within the realm of "the beautiful" and "the sublime", De Quincey's translation loosely plays down Kant's discussion about the grotesque sublime in oriental cultures, especially in Chinese and Indian ones. While Kant's original argument is more closely tied to his thematic concern, De Quincey's translated text appears overshadowed by his personal judgment and preference.

This particular instance showcases De Quincey's usage of language as a manipulative device. In the original footnote, Kant mentions that the Chinese "preserve[s] a miserable custom from the most ancient times of ignorance, although they are now so much better informed".²⁷⁹ This is utterly distorted in its meaning and is translated into a custom "derived from the elder ages of grossest ignorance, and still retained *in defiance of* better information" (DQW4: 157). De Quincey's linguistic strategy is rather dubious. Compared to Kant's more neutral choices of words, De Quincey's translation seems more opinionated. In Kant's original, the word "grotesque (content)" (in German, *fratzenhalt*) is repeatedly used to

²⁷⁹ Kant, p. 110.

illustrate his idea of Oriental grotesque sublime whereas in De Quincey's translation, the word "senseless" is more often used, which takes away the central part of Kant's original argument. As for "traditional fooleries", Kant's original uses "venerable grotesqueries" (in German, *ehrwuerdige Fratzen*). What's more, as Kant's original simply employs the word "ignorance" (in German, *Unwissenheit*) whereas De Quincey adds the word "grossest" to exaggerate. These word choices exemplify De Quincey's overemphasis on the negative aspects of the Orient, particularly China. Turning his back on Kant's notion of the "grotesque sublime" about the Orient, De Quincey implicitly renounces the Oriental sublime, suggesting the shift in his attitude towards the Orient in general. Also, his conscious decision to select and translate only this section of Kant's work proves that he might be prepared to take on the national characteristics of other countries on a greater scale, especially China.²⁸⁰

In a historical essay published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1837, De Quincey made an attempt to deal with an oriental race in full length. The article, titled "The Revolt of the Kalmuck Tartars; or, Flight of the Kalmuck Khan and His People from the Russian Territories to the Frontiers of China", is largely based on Benjamin Bergmann's *Nomadische Streifereien unter den Kalmüken in den Jahren 1802 und 1803*, with additional historical materials from Jesuit missionaries' works. In this long essay, De Quincey takes on the history of the West Mongolian people, the Kalmuck, and their almost tragic, biblical-like exodus from Russia to China which took place in the winter of 1770 to 1771. The attempt by Ubashi Khan to lead his people back to their ancestral land ended up with a catastrophic failure as only one third of the people succeeded eventually. Others were captured, enslaved or simply died from starvation and thirst in the journey. De Quincey cleverly added some dramatic elements to the narrative, as he puts these Kalmuck people through "the most awful series of calamities, and the most extensive, which is any where recorded to have visited the sons and daughters of men" (DQW9: 187). His recreation of the extremities of the natural as well as the man-made catastrophes renders the narrative in more of an allegorical and a fictional level rather than historical. De Quincey's poetic use of his materials creates numerous questions as to its accuracy in dates and details, it gives the grand

²⁸⁰ The German original quoted above is from the 1838 edition of Kant's work. See Kant, Immanuel et al. *Immanuel Kant's sämtliche Werke: Th. Kritik der Urtheilskraft, und Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*. Leipzig: Leopold Voss, 1838.

spectacular effect of the story of the Kalmuck's flight and pursuit. Peter J. Kitson pursues De Quincey's handling of the materials and concludes his construction of the Tartars is not realistic but "a product of fantasy", and his Tartars "inhabi[t] the fantastic space of the imaginary land of Tartary"²⁸¹. In this long journey of the Kalmuck, China is the ultimate destination, a clever and interesting device to demonstrate De Quincey's binary thinking. In the narrative, the Kalmuck belongs neither to Russia nor to China, their religions neither Christian nor Islamic, and their race neither Caucasian nor Asian²⁸². Kitson notices that the Kalmuck, like most of De Quincey's characters, falls into "an in-between category".²⁸³ In this semi-historical tour de force, De Quincey interestingly ends the story with a scene where China demonstrates and corresponds to the Enlightenment ideal of Utopia. In the last few paragraphs, the Chinese Emperor, Kien Long (the same emperor who received and yet hindered the Macartney Embassy from staying in China), interferes and sends the Chinese cavalry to assist the Kalmuck people, which ends their torturing misery. With the Chinese Emperor's orders to help this people to settle down, the Kalmuck, after their memorable year of misery, were

[...] replaced in territorial possessions, and in comfort equal perhaps, or even superior, to that which they had enjoyed in Russia, and with superior political advantages. But, if equal or superior, their condition was no longer the same; if not in degree, their social prosperity had altered in quality; for instead of being a purely pastoral and vagrant people, they were now in circumstances which obliged them to become essentially dependent upon agriculture; and thus far raised in social rank, that, by the natural course of their habits and the necessities of life, they were effectually reclaimed from roving and from the savage customs connected with a half nomadic life. They gained also in political privileges, chiefly through the immunity from military service which their new relations enabled them to obtain. There

²⁸¹ Peter J. Kitson. *Romantic Literature, Race, and Colonial Encounter*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. pp 175-213.

²⁸² In *Becoming Yellow*, Keevak notices that the ideas of the Tartars, the Kalmucks and the Mongols were often confused and interchangeable in and before the eighteenth century, and only became more distinguishable in the nineteenth century after Johann Friedrich Blumenbach's *De generis humani varietate native* came out in 1795, in which Blumenbach coined the categories "Mongolian" and "Caucasian", two terms that were later greatly adapted and helped shape the ideas of East Asian races.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

were circumstances of advantage and gain. But one great disadvantage there was, amply to overbalance all other possible gain: the chances were lost or were removed to an incalculable distance for their conversion into Christianity, without which, in these times, there is no absolute advance possible on the path of true civilisation. (DQW9: 206)

De Quincey's use of China here is bewildering. The Kalmuck to whom China appears to be a "superior" choice as, it is, after all, is in "territorial possession". They would enjoy greater "political advantage" in China than in Russia in the past, but Kalmuck's inclusion in the Chinese civilisation is to move from being "pastoral and vagrant" to being "dependent" and agricultural. De Quincey sees this as a taming process to domestic the foreign. Although in the Chinese history, this is not the first time that the Chinese cultures as a whole in general embraces a foreign (and oftentimes regarded barbarous) force and includes it in its polity matrix, this, nevertheless, corresponds very well to the emerging race theories and the growing political notions of nationalism in the nineteenth century. This again brings back Keevak's discussion that "the West has begun to export its purportedly self-evident definitions of yellowness and Mongolianness into East Asian contexts, and this dispersal was hardly simple and straightforward."²⁸⁴ The Kalmuck people, as a tribe of the Mongolian, have been traditionally linked to "non-Chinese barbarians" by both China and the West, and a not-so-implicit notion of racial inferiority is thus presented. What is more interesting in this narrative is its actual references to Christianity. De Quincey's belief that Christianity is the supreme standard of all civilisations obviously overrides the conjectural development of human history. He argues that without Christianity, "there is no absolute possible on the path of true civilisation", with which he reconfirms his not only Euro-centric but also Christian-centric point of view. Christianity here is merely an accessory that highlights China's (as well as the Kalmuck's) racial and cultural inferiorities if compared to European racial paradigms. As a result, China has never achieved (and probably will never achieve) "true civilisation" because of its lack of becoming a Christian country. In this light, China is excluded from De Quincey's mapping of *true* knowledge: whatever level China has achieved in civilisation is, after all, insignificant.

²⁸⁴ Keevak. p. 8.

From this point on, De Quincey's animosity towards China only intensifies. His next treatment of a China-related subject appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* in April, 1840, under the title of "The Opium and the China Question". This essay was actually composed and completed in 1822 as the tension between China and Britain started mounting, but was released 18 years later. On the British side, after the Amherst Embassy, Britain came to realise that there was little hope of opening up the inland market of China because of the lockdown policy of the Qing Government, and both diplomatic failures of Macartney Embassy and Amherst Embassy frustrated the British government, the intellectuals and the general public alike.²⁸⁵ Apart from this, with the East India Company's trading and the military power in India fast growing, China became a crucial market for the opium over which the East India Company had a monopoly. The smuggling conducted by the East India Company was not only to gain great profit but also to ease off the considerable imbalance of increasing trade deficit created by the European market's high demands for Chinese commodities. On the Chinese side, due to the lure of profitable bribery, some local government officials joined the network of the opium smuggling, causing the widespread domestic adoption of opium, which eventually became a general concern for imperial officials, and intellectuals in the Qing government. As a result, the Qing government determined to put a stop to this national habit.²⁸⁶ In 1839, Lin Tse-Hsu was appointed as the Imperial Commissioner to suppress the illegal opium trade in Canton. Lin's firm stance upset the British merchants along with Charles Elliot, the Chief Superintendent of British Trade, as they failed to negotiate with Lin. Charles Elliot was then ready to wage a war against China, but Commissioner Lin threatened to hold the British merchants and workers in British Embassy and East India Company hostage, which eventually forced the British to yield and compromise. Elliot then agreed

²⁸⁵ Peter J. Kitson, for example, closely examines Robert Southey and tracks a divider of opinions in his works: the succeeding embassies in particular. Kitson sees Southey's struggled efforts to accommodate his early readings in his aesthetic reality after Southey read of John Barrow's accounts. Kitson, along with other critics, also notices Fanny's reading of Macartney Embassy in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814) as an "intersection of domestic and global politics". See Peter J. Kitson, "Robert Southey and the Romantic Failure of China". *Wordsworth Circle*: Winter2011, Vol. 42 Issue 1, pp. 77-85.

²⁸⁶ For example, Chinese official Huang Juezi reported to Emperor Dao Guang that "from gentlemen and officials of upper class to workers, merchants, actors, labourers, and women, nuns, monks alike, people are addicted to the use of opium. [...] We are using the good fortune of Chinese nation to fill in the gap that foreign countries created. Opium is a poison, and is becoming a bad habit that is weighing down our country. Day after day, year after year, I am afraid that there is no end to this". See Huang Juezi. *The Compilation of Huang's Reports to Emperor*. June 2nd, 1838.

to the demand from Commissioner Lin, and ordered British merchants to hand over the opium stock to Lin. In March, 1839, under Commissioner Lin's inspection, opium worth of £4 million was burnt down to ashes. This act elevated the tensions between two countries. In July, one Chinaman was killed by a drunken British soldier. Commissioner Lin ordered the British side to turn over the soldier, but the British declined the request, which brought the tension to a boiling point. The Chinese side cut off all trade with the British side immediately. The British felt intimidated by Chinese orders, and the British Parliament decided to wage a war as revenge in response to Chinese acts, marking the beginning of The First Opium War, two months after this essay appeared on *Blackwood's Magazine*.²⁸⁷

De Quincey's firmer and more critical stance against China was thus not unimaginable. On the one hand, De Quincey blamed Charles Elliot for yielding to China; on the other hand, De Quincey regarded China as a despotic and stagnant country. From the beginning of the essay, De Quincey justified Britain's right to pursue a war against China by making two points:

I. China might be right in her object, and yet wrong – insufferably wrong – in the means by which she pursued it. In the first of the resolutions moved on the 2d of May by the Company of Edinburgh Merchants, (Mr Oliphant, chairman,) it is assumed that the opium lost by the British was a sacrifice to the “*more effectual execution of the Chinese laws*”, which is a gross fiction. The opium was transferred voluntarily by the British: on what understanding is one of the points we are going to consider. II. There is a *causa belli* quite apart from the opium question; a ground of war which is continually growing more urgent; a ground which would survive all disputes about opium, and would have existed had China been right in those disputes from beginning to end. (DQW11: 534)

De Quincey's viewpoints are not a complete novelty to his contemporaries. Aware of the diplomatic failures of both embassies, De Quincey concludes the failures to humiliations of a national scale. In other words, as the

²⁸⁷ To read further discussions about the Opium War, see Chen Chia-Hwan. *Images of the Other; Images of the Self: Reciprocal Representations of the British and the Chinese from the 1750s to the 1840s*. Diss. University of Warwick, 2007. Print.

failures mark the great setback for the expanding British Empire and imperialism, De Quincey feels a sense of urgency to claim the national pride. Economically, De Quincey sees the trade deficit has caused financial loss of British commercial benefits in China, a concern that is surprisingly similar to that of Defoe's. As previously discussed, Defoe's worry lies in the assumption that the enormous outflow of precious metal would weaken the economic power of England and would enrich the private monopoly such as East India Company. De Quincey's observations coincidentally echoes back to Defoe's notion and in fact fortifies Defoe's viewpoint, as both writers see the British economy is endangered by the trade with China.²⁸⁸ In terms of politics, the increasing conflicts between two countries have come to a point that the war is only a matter of time. Fuelled by Charles Elliot's strategic compromise with China, De Quincey furiously comments that Elliot "[gives] up British property by wholesale", yielding to China "without an effort to obtain an equivalent, without a protest, without a remonstrance" (DQW11: 534), despite Elliot's manipulation to protect the Englishmen in China from a potential massacre of hostages. De Quincey supposes that Elliot is a dupe and Commissioner Lin a cheat, as Lin takes advantage of Elliot to exclude British people from trade and commerce in Canton area of China. Apart from this, De Quincey believes that Elliot must have benefited personally by making a deal with Commissioner Lin. And moving from a personal level of this opium issue, De Quincey furthers his points by comparing Britain and China and concludes that China is, by any European standard, a petty civilisation. He proudly acclaims that "of all nations that ever have been heard of", the Englishmen are "the most scattered and exposed" with "a reverence for laws", "constitutional energy" and "a pure religion". He then comments on China that

Now, what we are in the very supreme degree, that is China in the lowest. We are the least defended by massy concentration – she the most so. We have the colonial instinct in the strongest degree – China in the lowest. With us the impulses of expatriation are almost morbid in their activity – in China they are undoubtedly morbid in their torpor. [...] It is vain to expect much energy in a

²⁸⁸ That said, on the topic of the British economy and its trade with China, Defoe specifically finds faults in the import and the fad for chinoiserie, while De Quincey lays his main focal points on the smuggling of opium as a way to balance out the commercial deficit with China.

direction which is habitually frowned upon by the Chinese authorities and institutions. And accordingly, not now only, but for a very long futurity, we must expect to see sailors, shipbuilders, colonists, foreign capitalists, merchants, &c., thriving only as those thrive who are a despised class of offcasts. There is not motion enough in the stagnant state of Chinese society to hope for any material change. And to China as it is – not China as it might be – we must adapt our future relations, which are annually becoming more important. (DQW11: 545-546)

If not self-plagiarised, De Quincey again repeats to his readers the national characteristics in his translation of Kant's work and reiterates his fundamental belief that England's premium status as a constitutional, law-abiding and religious country. It is also noteworthy that De Quincey's rhetoric is growing more aggressive with his emphasis on the inferiority of China and the superiority of England, by which he suggests that England "must adapt" its future relations with China since China is "morbid". In other words, with the suggestion of British (and European) dynamic, China is, on the contrary, inactive and passive. And by this standard, European countries possess the best civilisation, and China the worst. Without a doubt, the imperial and colonial expansion has endowed Britain with great national pride and ambition to pursue the accumulation of political and economic capitals with the naval force and achievement enhancing the imperial ambition overseas. To correspond to these secular achievements on earth on such a national scale, De Quincey felt the need to correspond to the religious passion. As complementing the pureness of Christianity, De Quincey implies the falsehood of other religions, a reminiscence of the design in his Kalmuck essay where he suggests no true civilisation can be established without Christianity. In this light, China is by all means diseased and "morbid"²⁸⁹, and cannot afford "any material change". De Quincey believes that China is "incapable of true civilisation, semi-refined in manners and mechanic arts, but incurably savage in the moral sense", and thus it becomes "certain" that Britain "must have some

²⁸⁹ This again is rather similar to the popular racial ideas in the nineteenth century. Keevak cites yellow as an important colour in humoral theory in the Renaissance time and even after, and yellow as a colour that "was generally associated with a fiery and choleric temperament." Yellow jaundice, a disease of the bile or gall bladder, was typically described in the eighteenth-century medical texts and its symptoms included lassitude, sloth and laziness, which, in Keevak's words, "bear a curious resemblance to the incipient Sinophobic stereotypes of 'lazy Chinese'". See Keevak. p. 52.

sort of military expedition against China” (DQW11: 555-556).

The “military expedition” that De Quincey foresaw and foretold fatally became an inevitable event between Britain and China. On 7th January, 1841, the British force, under the command of Charles Elliot, commenced the attacks on several ports in Canton area. The British won concessions from the Chinese side. On 20th January, Charles Elliot and Qishan, the Governor of Quanxi and Canton, sat down and issued an agreement, known as “The Convention of Cheunpi”. The agreement was never officially acknowledged by both governments. And soon after the signing of this convention, both Charles Elliot and Qishan were dismissed from their positions. However, the agreement they reached in the convention were later included in “The Treaty of Nanking” in 1842, after the First Opium War took place. In the wake of British military success, in November, 1841, again on *Blackwood's Magazine*, De Quincey published another essay on the current situation of Sino-British relations, under the title “Canton Expedition and Convention”. The essay is said to have been inspired by the fact that “her Majesty’s forces have been trepanned into loathing accomplices” in the convention. Fundamentally, this essay is not greatly distinctive from the previous one, as it reasserts the ingloriousness of the acts by Charles Elliot and Commissioner Lin. It only reconfirms De Quincey’s belief that China is a country without any sense of morality. De Quincey claims that the Englishmen “understand nothing of the Chinese imbecility” (DQW13: 72), and no one should ever trust in the Chinese “low miserable cunning” and spurious sagacity. De Quincey declares that the Chinese cunning is “that of an infant, whose limitation of intellect does not allow it to perceive that its wiles are looked through and through; understood and measured at a glance” (DQW13: 72). The Chinese are also “short-sighted” and “imbecile” in their strategy in warfare. De Quincey furthers his argument:

Were they to see an opening at this moment for exterminating every Englishman in the waters of China, it would as little lay any restraint upon a bloody scheme, that an avenging English armament would make their houses a desolation in a few revolving months, as it would that they themselves were abusing confidence reposed, or pledges interchanged. A mere notional foresight is not that practical or operative prudence which arises in a profounder civilisation. (DQW13: 72)

Chinese people are low, miserable, cunning, spurious, infantile, and weak, and more importantly, China as a whole is shallow in terms of civilisation, as De Quincey asserts. He dramatises the clash of civilisations between the sophisticated England and the degenerated China, and his excessive resentment against China substantiates his sense of superiority as an Englishman. In a general sense, this briefer essay is, compared to the previous one, more coherent in terms of concept development. At the end of this essay, De Quincey advocates with a new-found confidence and claims that “nothing can be more inevitable than the vast political connexion with China which will grow out of the present commercial quarrel.” As it cannot be “evaded”, it is only sensible that the British people “must rise to the level of exigency” to make themselves more profitable in order to “maintain even” the British commercial connection with China; only by doing so should the British be able to “operate upon China” (DQW13: 80-81). This remark highlights De Quincey’s individual plea to call for the military intervention to settle the conflict if Britain wished to build up a more substantial commercial connection with China. De Quincey suggests the possibility to renew the mercantile relations between two countries. This idea is even more explicit in the last paragraph as De Quincey comments “with a general confidence” that “thus far in the great outline of our prospects we are right...ten years ahead will carry us onwards to the provincial settlement and the establishment of our own local army as the only ultimate dependence of pretences to such a reach of foresight” (DQW13: 81). This operation upon China is in sight because of the “exquisite imbecility and exquisite profligacy of Chinese nature”. De Quincey also suggests that “many times must the artillery score its dreadful lessons upon [the Chinese] carcasses” to sustain the British benefits in China, “before [the Chinese] will be healed of their treachery” (DQW13: 81). As De Quincey employs a more aggressive tone and has the audacity to recommend the military intervention to settle the problems with China, it has become a firm belief that underlines the change in his later attitude towards China.

De Quincey’s last attempt to deal with the question of China took place in 1857, as Sino-British relations worsened again. Since “The Treaty of Nanking” was signed in 1842, Britain had seen some more benefits in China and wished to renegotiate the treaty in order to expand its privileges, which China firmly rejected. In October, 1856, *The Arrow*, a ship owned by Chinese and registered in Hong Kong, was suspected of piracy and

smuggling, and Qing officials boarded the ship to investigate, and later arrested the crew of twelve. The British officials demanded the immediate release of these sailors, which was ignored by the Governor of Canton and Guangxi, Yeh Mingchen. Yeh's stubborn stance annoyed the British side, which later caused "The Second Opium War" in 1858—in which China was again defeated—and the signing of "The Treaty of Tientsin". The incident of the Arrow inspired De Quincey to write an article "China". But as soon as this essay was published, De Quincey started to work on the second essay on the very same topic, and both essays were published in *Titan* magazine in early 1857. These two essays were compiled as a political pamphlet published in April, 1857. De Quincey's critiques in both essays are nothing new, and merely resonates his earlier ideas in previous essays. In the first essay "China [I]", De Quincey reviews briefly the Sino-British history since the Macartney Embassy. It is not until "China [II]" that De Quincey starts to put more emphasis on the incident of the Arrow. That said, De Quincey's comment are not particularly insightful or observant, and he reiterates some repetitive ideas about the silliness, the obstinacy and the inferiority of China when compared to Britain. Again, he states:

They [Chinese] had seen nothing whatever of our national grandeur; nothing of our power; of our enlightened and steadfast constitution system; of our good faith; of our magnificent and ancient literature, of our colossal charities and provisions for every form of human calamity; of our insurance system, which so vastly enlarged our moneyed power; of our facilities for confederating and combining, and using the powers of all (as in our banks the money of all) for common purposes; of our mighty shipping interest; of our docks, arsenals, light-houses, manufactories, private or national. (DQW18: 86)

In this passage, De Quincey exposes and shapes his xenophobia in an almost plausibly rational, analytical way. In terms of British benefits in China, De Quincey demonstrates a patriotic enthusiasm and a sense of racial supremacy. The more he uses "our", the more he is distinguishing "ours" from "others". To reassert and reconfirm national identity, the highlight of modern establishments in Britain is what he takes pride in. Thus, China, on the contrary, is not enlightened, not industrialised, not commercialised, not cultural, not Christian, and not even martially capable.

In general, De Quincey defines China by negatives, and his views are not limited to China alone. In fact, in a later section of this essay, he argues that “this hideous degradation of human nature [...] has always disgraced the East”, and that “no Asiatic state has ever debarbarised itself” (DQW18: 91). In his irrational rage, De Quincey oversimplifies the concept of Asia, and the Asiatic countries become indistinguishable and indistinguishably condemned. Many writers have pointed out that apart from the high tide of national and racial supremacy, one of the reasons that De Quincey addresses his racist remarks was because his son, Lieutenant Horatio De Quincey, died of fever near Canton in 1842, just before the two countries made peace.²⁹⁰ The incident might have fuelled his unsettling rage against China. In the preface to the political pamphlet edition of *China*, De Quincey’s attempt to justify the Opium War is violent as he addresses China as a cancerous country, but at the same time China has nothing “on which cancer could prey...it is vain [for the Chinese] to count upon any filial tenderness or reverential mercy towards their dying mother” (DQW18: 134). The association of cancer with China / the East recurs to De Quincey, an incurable disease that shows the degeneration of China. To him, China is a massive body with no vital organs, no stamina, and is a diseased, dying body infected by opium, and now is placed on the chopping block.

Modern critics such as John Barrell and Nigel Leask approach De Quincey’s xenophobia and Sinophobia with psychoanalysis, to examine not only his psyche but also how it can be corresponded to the development of British colonialism. Both critics emphasise the expansion of the British imperialism on De Quincey’s anxiety, which relates to his early childhood experiences. For Barrell, although it is difficult to determine how his childhood traumatic experiences are associated with the oriental image or vice versa, yet it is undoubtedly the case that De Quincey’s Sinophobia is a displacement of his primal and private terror. For Nigel Leask, De Quincey identifies the East with the lower social classes in England, which results in not only racial but also class hatred. His argument focuses on De Quincey’s patriotic passion for England, and the worries that the torpid nation might hurt its pride eventually. Stagnant China, or the coalesced Asia, takes blame for De Quincey’s domestic

²⁹⁰ For example, Peter J Kitson mentions Horatio’s death and the publications of these essays. See Peter J. Kitson, “Robert Southey and the Romantic Failure of China”. *Wordsworth Circle*: Winter2011, Vol. 42 Issue 1, pp. 77-85.

anxiety. Peter J. Kitson, however, proposes that De Quincey's representation of the East "is less involved with the psychopathology of its originator, and more concerned to view them as an idiosyncratic and personalised intensification of an increasingly biological nineteenth-century racial discourse about the East, one which homogenises and alienates"²⁹¹. Kitson argues that "a fully biological and essentialising racial belief has achieved a dominance over other religious, economic, and commercial discourse" in De Quincey's writing. As a result of this, "[t]he eighteenth-century construction and exploitation of the distinction between savage Tartar and civilised Chinese that defined difference through a stadial notion of social progress was increasing racialised, and in the end, abandoned in favour of a monolithic and physical categorisation of the peoples of the Far East".²⁹² Michael Keevak informs that "[P]hysicians, too, regularly described [...] 'Mongolian' conditions could be linked to physiological degeneration and play into even older clichés about the static, infantile, and imitative Far East"; thus, many people in the nineteenth century still hold strong belief and this popular thought that "real yellow people remained stagnant and frozen in a permanent state of childishness, sub-humanity and underdevelopment."²⁹³ And as the stereotypes and cultural memories were well-established and were strongly connected with the science and its analytical nature, China, under this newly dominant thought of racial bias, has fallen from grace and was not romanticised as it once was.

Throughout De Quincey's essays, in his earlier writings about China, China and other Asiatic countries are not distinguished (and probably are not worth any further distinction), and the idea of the Far East is a collective concept, the mysterious *terrae incognitae*. Partly influenced by Enlightenment ideas, De Quincey believes that China can still be a semi-civilised nation where people like the barbaric Kalmuck can enjoy the commercial prosperity and a taste of civilisation, even though China

²⁹¹ Peter J. Kitson, *Romantic Literature, Race, and Colonial Encounter*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. pp 175-213.

²⁹² Douglas Lorimer shares similar opinions on the science of race in the nineteenth-century. Lorimer comments that "The scientists assumed that a correlation existed between anatomical features and mental and psychological traits. In fact, descriptions of racial group often gave a simple list of both physical, and social and mental characteristics without elaborating on the relationship of biology to social behaviour." See Douglas A. Lorimer. "Race, science and culture: historical continuities and discontinuities, 1850-1914" in *The Victorian and Race*. Ed. Shearer West, Hampshire: Scolar Press, 1997. pp.12 - 33.

²⁹³ Keevak, p. 6.

has long been stagnant in terms of civilisation and despotic in terms of political format. Besides, because of its association with opium, it produces both pains and pleasures that can manipulate not only the psychological but also the physical aspects of the *English* opium-eater. His earlier experiences of living in the city create the sexual, economic, urban frustrations, political and social conflicts and opium, along with the idea of the East, somewhat resonate in his later writing. On the one hand, opium provides stamina, and stimulates him not only his body but also his psyche. On the other hand, the opium produces some of the most troubling dreams over-shadowed by the threat of death. The association between the East and opium renders the East or China a merely materiality that can be taken, eaten, or swallowed up by an Englishman. This concept has grown out of a more literal sense to a more abstract idea, as Western countries have obtained more military successes in China, and China is devoured by these foreign forces. And with more British military and economic triumph in China, De Quincey is more daring to take a radical and violent stance towards China. As De Quincey takes more pride in British colonial expansion overseas, he becomes more racially aware and feels more racially and religiously superior. Whether this is because of his psychological anxiety, or simply a generally-accepted growing belief in the nineteenth-century that the East is inferior to the West in terms of biology, there is no doubt that the idea of race dominates over other concerns that De Quincey has with China. The greater English dominance over China, the more De Quincey feels secure in his own identity *as* an Englishman, not Malay, or any other character in his visionary fantasy. The military expedition and political intervention unveils the fact that China is stagnant and despotic, and accordingly China is no longer unknown. China to De Quincey is like a body without central nervous system, and is in need of a renewal from the West, even though this renewal might be a forced one. What De Quincey's writings have demonstrated to modern readers correspond to the transition of perspectives about China from pre-Romantic era to mid-nineteenth century. Whether it is Marco Polo's journey or the Jesuit treatments that over-praised for its mild weather, great fertility and highly philosophical and civilised land that produced a wide range of chinoiserie, or even the manifesto that the Chinese are biologically and racially inferior to the Europeans, by mid-nineteenth century, China has undergone a long journey of being "romanticised" and its past glory has come to a full stop.

From this point on, China would have to face a series of humiliations as aggressions from Western countries grew. From the mid-nineteenth century, China is the centre piece that every colonial country wants its share. The unknown is unveiled, and the most shameful and embarrassing chapter in Chinese modern history will unfold.

Conclusion

Kublai asks Marco, "When you return to the West, will you repeat to your people the same tales you tell me?"

"I speak and speak," Marco says, "but the listener retains only the words he is expecting. The description of the world to which you lend a benevolent ear is one thing; the description that will go the rounds of the groups of stevedores and gondoliers on the street outside my house the day of my return is another; and yet another, that which I might dictate late in life, if I were taken prisoner by Genoese pirates and put in irons in the same cell with a writer of adventure stories. It is not the voice that commands the story: it is the ear."

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, Chapter IX, p 135²⁹⁴

Italo Calvino's 1972 novel, *Invisible Cities*, is a work loosely constructed around the travelogue by a thirteenth-century Venetian merchant-traveller, Marco Polo, which tells of his travels to China via central Asia. The two historical figures, Marco Polo and Kublai Khan are used to explore numerous imaginary cities. As these cities are more literary production than actual substance, the descriptions of cities can be regarded as the author's attempt to pursue the essence of the idea of the "city". The author introduces Marco Polo as a knowledgeable traveller from the West who has been to many places that the Tartar Emperor has conquered. There are nine major chapters in the book, demonstrating the author's ambition to tackle different aspects of city. Interestingly, each chapter begins and ends with dialogues or interactions between the two characters, which not only provides the story with a different level of philosophical thinking but also cultural exchanges and impasses. The poetic elements the author weaves into the context further blur the fine line between historical and fictional writing. The discursive conversations often remind readers of a religious and philosophical catechism. Nevertheless, the catechism in their exchange of ideas is not about giving one specific answer; rather, about illumination. Thus, there is no hierarchy of power in their conversation. The power relation between the pair is not fixed and is always mutable.

²⁹⁴ Calvino, Italo. *Invisible Cities*. trans. William Weaver. London: Secker & Warburg, 1974.

The fictional element also enables the characters to transcend the tempo-spatial limits, and the spiritual and conceptual journey the two enjoy can thus only be completed in each other's company.

The two characters are relevant to this thesis, as they recall one of the earliest encounters between the East and the West. The book, *Books of the Marvels of the World*, written by Marco Polo's prisonmate Rustichello da Pisa, appeared on the market in the thirteenth century. Even though there have long been doubts about the book's credibility since its publication, the travelogue of Polo swiftly took over the European world. Translations and different editions were put out, and this work amazed European readers with the wonders and the richness of the Far East, particularly the eastern empire of China. In the narrative, China is a country filled with an incredible abundance of luxurious material goods and excessive extravagance. Apart from Maro Polo's fascinating fictional-like descriptions of China, the conquest of the Mongolians stretched to the border of Europe, which not only facilitated the trade between China and Europe, but also further strengthened the European idea that China was a wealthy and strong country. The European audience remained impressed even after the decline of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), known as the Tartar Dynasty in the history of China.

The dialogue cited above from Calvino's novel explores the idea of representation. Marco Polo's reply to the Tartar Emperor is right: even though the story may be the same, the audience would freely and loosely re-approach it with individual interpretations. And when it comes to China, this is exactly what happened to the representations of it in the European world. With numerous images of China available at hand, European perceptions of China went through a transformation during the seventeenth century. William Appleton notes that

As little by little, the attitude toward China had shifted from a medieval one of wonder to one of realistic appraisal, so during the seventeenth century it was to alter again to one of calculated adulation. The rich and confused material of these accounts gave food for thought to many seventeenth century writers, in particular the theological polemicists.²⁹⁵

²⁹⁵ Appleton. *The Cycle of Cathay*. p. 20.

In this period, it is obvious that China was never one single image. Rather, China was always retold, tailored and altered. The unsettled debates over China conflicted with one another, particularly in the English-speaking world. Direct and official documents were always lacking; as a result, texts translated into European languages were in heavy demand, and the diverse images of China competed for attention. Many writers edited, fabricated and appropriated the idea of China to fit in the context of their discussions. As Appleton points out, China was facing yet another alteration in the seventeenth century, and the debates continued into the eighteenth century when even more writers contributed their intellectual reflections on the very subject itself. China, or the East in general, was therefore used to contrast and compare with Europe during the long eighteenth century.

In accordance with Appleton, the historian Gregory Blue also notices “the radical reversal of Western judgments about almost all aspects of Chinese culture which took place from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century”.²⁹⁶ For a long time, a wide variety of scholarship has sought to explore this. However, when citing previous scholarship, Blue finds it rather unconvincing to simply associate China’s reputation with the “art-historical” nature, which was “bound to fall into decline”. Besides, Blue also finds the argument too weak when scholars proposed that the sudden dramatic loss of interest in China resulted from the qualitative changes in Western knowledge of China. Scholars who support this argument believe that the more the West learns about China, the more they would be able to move from the myth to true knowledge. Although Blue thinks both arguments hold certain degree of truth, he also suggests some revisions. He adopts Louis Dermigny’s perspective, placing the shift of views regarding China “within the field of social history”, in which trade with China was considered by the bourgeoisie in several European countries to reduplicate the monarch’s centralisation of governance, in the hope of establishing and consolidating their social status and hegemony. The growing population of merchants who earned and quickly elevated their social status by importing the overseas goods, a move that not only attracted the upper class’ vast interests but also confirmed the national power and ostentatiously flaunted the national wealth, which highlighted

²⁹⁶ Gregory Blue. ‘China and western social thought in the modern period’. *China and Historical Capitalism: Genealogies of Sinological Knowledge*. Eds. Timothy Brook and Gregory Blue. Cambridge: CUP, 1999, pp. 57–109.

emergence of the bourgeoisie. In the meanwhile, these merchants duplicated the upper class' tastes and wooed the monarch with these foreign commodities. However, once the bourgeoisie's social hegemony was fully established, the early admiration for China and its cultural eminences could be disregarded and would soon be replaced by the growing frustrations at the constraints and restraints on trades between the Chinese government and the European countries. Also, the rising awareness of the bourgeoisie also generated the dynamics that promoted nationalistic and patriotic ideas, which turned the Sinophilic admiration into Sinophobic abomination. Consequently, Blue argues, the shift in late eighteenth-century evaluations of Chinese society and civilisation seemingly "have resulted not so much from any new empirical knowledge about the country, but rather from changes in Western perspectives."²⁹⁷

In his discussions of the drastic decline of the interests in Chinese scholarship in European world, Blue discovers that between 1750 and 1880, "there were dramatic falls in Western estimations not only of the Chinese, but also of the ancient Egyptians and of Semitic peoples generally".²⁹⁸ His discovery further indicates that the Orient in general lost its attraction to the Western audience in this era. One main reason that led to the occurrence of this phenomenon, Blue argues, is closely related to major industrial progress in the European world. While advocating "the Western European productive and scientific forces in the Industrial Revolutions provided strong reinforcement to ideas of European superiority", Blue deduces that "probably the most important thematic innovation behind the shift toward Sinophobia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was the new emphasis given to the idea of progress, a notion that was developed in such a manner as to set European nations categorically above others".²⁹⁹ European progressivism, when combined with the growth of patriotic nationalistic ideologies, easily further promotes the ideas of European superiority. Meanwhile, Chinese cultural and political stagnation highlighted by Enlightenment intellectuals such as Montesquieu were widespread, which moreover superseded positive images of China in early Enlightenment period. Montesquieu's discussion identifies China as a despotic regime, and this dismissive attitude towards Chinese political institutions and civilisation was widely

²⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 73.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 71.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 73.

embraced by the general public and by later writers.

From a material culture point of view, the loss of interest in chinoiserie also indicates a wider social change in European world, and the emergence of the middle class plays a decisive factor in this phenomenon. First, as hundreds of middle-class merchants have travelled afar to have trading business in China since 1672, they would have a more immediate experience than the intellectuals of the numerous obstructions by the Chinese government. Through word of mouth, several conflicts between the East India Company and the Qing government in Canton, and the failures of Lord Macartney's and Lord Amherst's embassies, the reputation of China went down like a landslide. Secondly, with the bourgeoisie's social hegemony being secured, the middle class no longer felt the need to emulate and imitate the tastes and lifestyles of the upper class. Before this, the upper class was under the charm of chinoiserie for more than half of a century, the emulative desire to purchase chinoiserie accelerated its promotion and circulation. As the middle class's consumption behaviours demonstrated their economic and financial capabilities, the increasing loss of interest in chinoiserie further signified that there was no longer a strong need for the bourgeoisie to adopt the aristocratic tastes. Meanwhile, when chinoiserie was first introduced to the European world, it was received without a deeper level of cultural significance, and sometimes not even any practical value. Consequently when the circulation of chinoiserie grew wider, its cultural significance was stretched too thin. In other words, when chinoiserie was only purchased for its superficial delicacy and beauty, the singularity and cultural speciality that chinoiserie possessed were lost. Precious and valuable chinoiserie turned into what Charles Lamb called "cheap luxury", and became something very commonly seen in the everyday household.

Elizabeth Hope Chang's book *Britain's Chinese Eyes*³⁰⁰ provides substantial evidence that the rise of British domestic manufacturers also took part in the wider circulation of chinoiserie, as British industrialists like Josiah Wedgwood spotted the new marketing techniques, which allowed "British porcelain to rapidly to gain wider distribution".³⁰¹ When British manufacturers found a way to duplicate—instead of

³⁰⁰ Elizabeth Hope Chang. *Britain's Chinese Eyes: Literature, Empire, and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Stanford: Stanford University Press: 2010.

³⁰¹ *Ibid*, p.76.

excluding—chinoiserie, it was to incorporate the Chinese elements into the British products. On one hand, it was a way to domesticate the foreign and alien Chinese elements in English culture. But on the other hand, as the local manufacturing products grew in number in circulation, they gradually squeezed out overseas imports from China. The ability to mass manufacture chinoiserie assured the technical improvements in Britain, which consolidated the ground for the exclusion of chinoiserie from China as well as reassured the British of their superiority, even though these “domestically manufactured pieces of porcelain became identified primarily as Chinese objects wielding Chinese visual influence”. The inclusion in design but exclusion in circulation interestingly reflected the fact that a part of Chinese-influenced aesthetics was generally accepted by British consumers while the growing awareness of racial superiority had little by little taken over in British minds.

Although the emerging notions of racial superiority changed British perceptions of China and chinoiserie, this shift in attitudes was never immediate and definite. Rather, as Blue points out, this was “a change in the balance of opinion”, a change “accompanied with a definite shift in emphasis and approach”. Blue notes that “the discussion in the earlier period often focused on positive implications of Chinese culture for the West, whereas emphasis in the late eighteenth century moved increasingly to explaining how aspects of China deviated from an alleged Western model.”³⁰² Blue’s words not only highlight the gradual shift in Western ideas about China, but also explain how this “alleged Western model” was established through time. The model was not established singlehandedly by one man or one work alone but by the collaboration of many intellectuals and cultural forces. Apart from this racial superiority, the general atmosphere of Britain’s progressivism in science and industry contributed to this decline of the Chinese vogue and scholarship. China was made a symbol of cultural and political stagnation across the spectrum of Western intellectuals’ works. Under such circumstances, Blue argues that “the stress on the alleged historical stasis of Chinese society brought into discredit the older idea that Westerners might ever have learnt anything from Chinese social practice” throughout the nineteenth century.³⁰³ Particularly after a series of major historical incidents such as the Opium Wars, “a range of supremacist attitudes was already in evidence

³⁰² Blue, p. 71.

³⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 76.

at this time”.³⁰⁴

Many critics argue that the racial supremacy served as the basis for British imperial expansion, especially in the nineteenth century. Gregory Blue and Timothy Brook also point out that “from the late eighteenth century until the period between the two world wars, the notion of capitalist society was embedded in Eurocentric theories of stages of progress”. And from this perspective, China as a culturally stagnant country “remained naturally near the bottom.”³⁰⁵ Blue and Brook also notice that in the prior recognition of China, China and capitalism are “a contrasting pair”, and the only way for China to make any economic progress was to “turn its back on the past and to take lessons from the West.” However, the fact that China was never able to fully embrace the idea of capitalism only strengthened the impression that China was still the opposite of Western progressivist ideology.

In her discussion of the generally negative attitudes towards China, Elizabeth Hope Chang observes that the commodity of opium and the opium dens were identified as “primary examples of a Chinese difference”, especially in the nineteenth-century London cityscape, as these special urban sites were portrayed as “persistent spatial shorthand denoting corrupting iniquity in British urban space both past and present.”³⁰⁶ Chang argues that the pessimistic sentiments for China were highlighted by many realist novels. Writings by Charles Dickens, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Oscar Wilde, Chang remarks, “describe British observers who, upon finding their own cities invaded by the opium den’s stupefying influence, soon discover that this influence has transformed their eyes and minds as well.”³⁰⁷ Chang spends some time on Dickens’ last unfinished novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870) and sees the crime-novel influence of Wilkie Collins’ popular work, *The Moonstone* (1868). But unlike *The Moonstone*, “*Drood* focuses especially on the transformative effects of prolonged opium use on both the British individual and the British urban space.” However, Chang notices that for Dickens (and many of his contemporary writers), China was blamed and depicted as a scapegoat

³⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 77.

³⁰⁵ Gregory Blue and Timothy Brook. “Introduction”. *China and Historical Capitalism: Genealogies of Sinological Knowledge*. Eds. Timothy Brook and Gregory Blue. Cambridge: CUP, 1999, p.4.

³⁰⁶ Chang, p.111.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 111.

with the non-differentiated Western imaginations of the East. Chang argues:

Opium was by the nineteenth century a global commodity whose cultivation and consumption neither began nor ended in China – the British grew the opium they sent to China in the Indian colonies; for example. Neither were the proprietors of these dens always Chinese; Lascars, Malays, and other South Asian and mixed-race characters occur frequently in opium den fictions. Nor did the Chinese of opium den fictions correlate clearly to actual circulations of Chinese human capital.³⁰⁸

Chang's observation gives us something to think about. The association of opium with China was not a cultural phenomenon generated by the Chinese but by the active force of the British imagination. Thomas De Quincey's *The Confession of an English Opium Eater*, for example, might have participated in the formation of this British imaginary. If contrasted with Chang's observation, we would easily find that De Quincey's *Opium Eater* corresponds very well to this particular finding, as he fails to—and probably never cares enough to—differentiate the Asian peoples. Whether it is in his dream vision or in reality, De Quincey refers to the south-east Asian countries as a human factory where human beings are reproduced and populated. This false belief stems from the prevalent Enlightenment ideas that China, along with other Asian countries, are nurtured by the mild weather, by the well-found political system, and by the fertile land, as Montesquieu very reluctantly admits in his *The Spirit of Laws*, for example. Consequently, when these negative images were joined by the recognition of the massive size of the Asian population, the Western sense of racial superiority was further secured, and from it there generated the xenophobia popularised in the nineteenth century.

Citing Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Gregory Blue concludes that the works dealing with the topic of China “might be taken to illustrate Edward Said's point that the reduction of ‘the Orient’ to the passive function of a set of symbols opened it to manipulation according to the changing interests.”³⁰⁹ Elizabeth Hope Chang suggests this significant shift in Sino-British history “marks a profound shift in the production and distribution of all

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

³⁰⁹ Blue, p. 69.

kinds of writings within and across Britain” where “with the expansion of the periodical press, the growth in quantity and variety of non-fiction narrative, and the rise of long-form novel [...] exploded over the course of the [nineteenth] century.”³¹⁰ This manifests “the rising of the literary real” when writers use “pre-existing collective standards of reality” to constitute readers’ imagination, and sometimes this “literary real” replaces the reality, and causes more confusions and misconceptions. From either Blue’s and Chang’s point of view, both scholars partly agree with Said’s presumption that the Euro-centric world claims a dichotomy between the East and the West, and through this dichotomy a mode of cultural hegemony is established, which, in Said’s words, results in the formation of Orientalist discourse. Said proposes that the East has been fundamentally misconceptualised as weaker than and inferior to the West, and through this cultural apparatus, “Orientalism is all aggression, activity, judgment, will-to-truth, and knowledge.” Said sums up his argument:

My whole point about this system is not that it is a misrepresentation of some Oriental essence—in which I do not for a moment believe—but that it operates as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting.³¹¹

Ultimately, Said believes that the concept of Orientalism does not take place contingently or accidentally. Rather, it comes into being by a deliberate process of the West, with a purpose to incorporate the East as “a backward, debased and degraded version of the Occident”, as Saree Makdisi argues.³¹² The distinction between the West and the East renders the East less substantial and more radically “other”, an otherness that eventually leads to a complete estrangement between the Orient and the Occident. Edward Said locates the beginning of “Orientalism” in the last two decades of the eighteenth century and the first two decades of the nineteenth century, which roughly corresponds to the span of Romanticism in European literature. Nigel Leask observes the relationship between the Romantic writers and the East and concludes:

European Orientalism, like European colonialism, had moved from

³¹⁰ Chang, p. 14.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

³¹² Saree Makdisi. *Romantic Imperialism*. Cambridge: CUP, 1998, p. 113.

being a commercial venture controlled by literature and financial freebooters or monopolising joint-stock companies to participation in the civilising mission of nineteenth-century European culture, or the expansionist dependence on colonial markets.³¹³

The “civilising mission” that European cultures offered the Orient in the nineteenth century showed that the process itself created an inequality in the power balance between the East and the West. Enlightened ideas about the universality shared by all human beings set the European world to quest for the uncharted worlds of the East, which emphasised rather than dismissed the racial and cultural differences, because the concept of universality could only be achieved through thorough comparisons with a process to incorporate and integrate the widest range of sources. However, through this narrow model of constant comparison, differences rather than similarities were highlighted. Gregory Blue also notes that “one of the general aims for modern Western social theory has been to explain the specific nature of various human societies in terms of universal principles and categories”, but “the nineteenth-century Western approach to China” happened to mark “a regression from the more cosmopolitan attitudes of Bernier and Voltaire.”³¹⁴ When this ideology and hope for universality (and cosmopolitanism) was dismissed, the racial and cultural distinctions lead to the interest in the biological features among people of all races, which generates the fast-emerging awareness of race studies in the nineteenth century, such as what Michael Keevak demonstrates in his latest work *Becoming Yellow: A Short History of Racial Thinking*. In the book, Keevak looks closely at the history of Western representations of Asian people, and argues convincingly that the idea of “yellowness” of Asian races was “invented” in the nineteenth century when “yellow had become a *racial* designation”, an idea that originated “in science discourse.”³¹⁵ And more importantly, to Keevak, these “Western racial paradigms” were “imported into Chinese and Japanese contexts” along with “many other aspects of modern Western science”, particularly in the late nineteenth century. In other words, the European (or, in a general sense, the Western) constitutions of Asian identities and “yellowness” stemmed not only from the lack of Asian physical or verbal presence in

³¹³ Nigel Leask. *British Romantic Writers and the East: The Anxieties of Empire*. Cambridge: CUP, 1992, p.22.

³¹⁴ Blue, pp. 108- 109.

³¹⁵ Keevak. “Introduction”. *Becoming Yellow*. p. 2.

the formation of such discourse, but also from the Western manipulation and exploitation in its very ideological essence, whether consciously or unconsciously. Keevak's findings confirm to us that when combined with the scientific progressivism, the influences of Orientalism accelerated and went beyond the locale of its origin. As the West physically invaded Asia and colonised many countries, the ideology such as Orientalism became not only accepted but also acceptable to many in the East. Keevak's findings confirm to us that when combined with the scientific progressivism, the influence of Orientalism accelerated and went beyond the locale of its origin. As the West physically invaded Asia and colonised many countries, Orientalism became not only accepted but also acceptable to many in the East. Although Keevak's arguments focus on the ground of scientific progressivism, he, like many other researchers on the topic of Orientalism, stresses the significance of the history and historicity in oriental studies, which eventually sets these studies apart from Said's works.

Though influential, Said's *Orientalism* is inevitably shaped by his own cultural background. Being a scholar of Palestinian descent, Edward Said's discussions focus primarily on the Middle East and the Islamic world and do not reach to the Far East where places such as India and China are left out in his discussions of "subtle and persistent Eurocentric prejudice against Arabo-Islamic peoples and their culture". Apart from this, his focus on the nineteenth- and twentieth-century studies excluded earlier literature; for example, the Enlightenment ideas about the East. Also, Said argues that the West's proposition to compare and contrast the East is never innocent. Rather, it is a deliberate consideration that further strengthens—instead of weakening—the opposing binary stance between the East and the West. The stereotype that the East is inferior to the West is also amplified through such acts. In other words, to simply presume that the Orient has always been dominated by the West discounts the fact that the early literature about the Orient actually considers the East as offering a chance of renewal of Western civilisation. China from the seventeenth or even early eighteenth centuries had long been regarded as a civilisation which can afford to provide the European world with new light and new insight. The early mapping of the Orient in Europe, though not in an organised manner, was mostly positive or neutral, a view that was made long before the negative views widespread by the colonial expansion in the nineteenth century. Said's construct of this concept seems too

unilateral and lacking a sense of comprehensive historicity and geography. In other words, the representations of the Orient from the West are selected by Said to highlight and support his arguments, which are rather confined and limited to a particular period of time and space only. Said somewhat falls into the stereotypes he sets out to criticise.

Historian and anthropologist Daniel Martin Varisco in his *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid* examines closely and thoroughly on Said's credibility and accuracy of data collected and used in Said's *Orientalism*. Varisco's inclusive inspection contextualises Said's idea of Orientalism in relation to his other works (including his interviews), with which Said's inconsistency and self-contradiction are shown. The biggest criticism that Varisco has towards Said lies in "the majority examples he provides as proof of bad, even evil, representation".³¹⁶ Varisco continues to remark:

Said's Orientalism is built quite consciously on the seemingly narrow "Anglo-French-American experience of the Arabs and Islam," but when this is taken as a unit, the broad range of possible orientations is reduced to a simplistic quasi-national base...Because Said makes no pretence of systematically examining the exhaustive corpus of texts or looking at other types of historical evidence, he ends up being the one who inscribes, as he ascribes, the quality and character of the experience.³¹⁷

Said's concept is challenged by many critics. Varisco notes, although the book is a milestone and provides powerful polemics, Said over-simplifies the Orient as a one-dimensional image, which is paradoxically his criticism of the West's representation of an assumed assimilated Orient. Apart from this, Varisco also sees most of the modern critics' criticism of Said and Orientalism not as a way of critiquing but as a way of consolidating and reinvigorating this problematic theoretical framework. In his conclusion, Varisco suggests that the academy should move beyond the polemic and transcend the binary of East and West, because even though the Orient was invented, it "continues in the process of analysis to be reinvented" and "the real Orient is not about to fade from view."³¹⁸

³¹⁶ Daniel Martin Varisco. *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007.

³¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 298.

³¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 303-304.

Within the spatio-temporal limits, the concept of “Orientalism” is only partial, fragmented and never complete. In his response to Orientalism, Varisco repeatedly appeals to “whittle away at bias and misinformation by using the methodologies of critical scholarship from established but evolving disciplines” with the joint forces of sound scholarship. However, if the Orient is always there and “is not about to fade from view”, why were there still so many misconceptions about the Orient? Can we really move and read beyond the concept of Orientalism itself?

The imaginary dialogue written by Calvino may be relevant to our enquiries. First of all, Polo as one of the few earliest European travellers to China, and Khan as one of the few Chinese emperors whose empire reached to the border of Europe, the cultural exchanges between the two go beyond the narrow scope of Said’s book. Secondly, the Orient is not about to fade from view. Polo’s case stands on the threshold of the West’s early expedition to the East. And ever since then, the Orient has never faded from view in the European world. Whether China was the land of wonders in the thirteenth century onward, or it was the philosophical land in the missionaries’ accounts in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, or the mercantile trading point in the pre-Romantic eighteenth century, or even a country that faced European invasion, China has always made an impact on the European world. Thirdly, as Varisco comments, “representation, especially by someone writing in another language or from an outsider’s perspective, is never going to be an exact duplication.”³¹⁹ In other words, even though the journey is the same, due to different audience’s receptions, the story of the same journey will end up very differently in different audiences. Therefore, the representations of one factual image could lead to various reinterpretations with some distortions, whether deliberately or unintentionally. In Calvino’s passage, the dialogue is never between the two historical/fictional characters only; it is a dialogue between China and Europe, as the two value systems and cultural standpoints shed light on each other.

In this thesis, the writers discussed demonstrate a turn from the fictional construct and the travel narratives to childhood memories and personal confessions. This process corresponds to a journey where China’s role has shifted from active participant in the making of Orientalism to a passive

³¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 501.

victim of European military acts. Edward Said's "Orientalism" overemphasises the Eurocentrism and through which all the temporal or spatial distinctions are homogenised. Consequently, as modern critic Arif Dirlik comments, "the question of representation raised in Said's *Orientalism* is not the correctness or erroneousess of Orientalist representation, but the metonymic reductionism that led to the portrayal of these societies in terms of some cultural trait or other, that homogenised differences within individual societies, and froze them in history".³²⁰ Dirlik highlights the lack of historicity and spatiality in Said's Orientalism, and suggests:

It is necessary [...] to restore full historicity to our understanding of the past and the present, historicity not in the sense that Said uses "historicism" (that presupposes organically holistic cultures) but historicity that is informed by the complexity of everyday life, which accounts not only for what unites but, more importantly, for diversity in space and time, which is as undesirable to national power as it is to Eurocentrism.³²¹

Dirlik's words show that representations of China are never going to be unmediated. After all, China is an intact political entity with its history and cultural heritage and is fully amenable multiple interpretations and cultural practices. Eventually, these will transcend and breathe new life into the ill-defined Orientalism that neglects the spatio-temporal differences among Asian countries. Also, the previous discussions of Orientalism often overlook the active participation of the Asian counterforce to the West / European colonial domination. For example, when the Jesuit missionaries first came to China, they had strong engagement with the Chinese intellectuals and governmental officials. Hence, on the one hand these Chinese intellectuals' minds were making positive and active contributions in the early process of the European mapping of China. And on the other hand, these European scholars were "orientalised"—or, to be more specific, "Sinicised"—when they had first-hand direct cultural contacts and exchanges with the Chinese. Apart from this, when the Chinese material goods were imported to Europe, Chinese aesthetics interested many Europeans, which reshaped and extended the European

³²⁰ Arif Dirlik. "Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism". *History and Theory*, Vol. 35, No. 4, "Theme Issue 35: Chinese Historiography in Comparative Perspective" (Dec., 1996). pp. 96-118.

³²¹ *Ibid*, 118.

artistic senses. The Chinese Pagoda included in the Royal Botanic Gardens in London (known as Kew Gardens), for instance, was built in 1761 and still remains today to witness this trend. The Royal Pavilion in Brighton (first built in 1787) can also testify this widespread Chinese vogue. The particular aesthetics was widely used in architecture, in paintings, and in many decorative art forms.

Edward Said rightly associates nineteenth-century European military expedition and colonisation with the high point of Orientalism, but he ignores the fact that the scholarship on the Orient has decreased sharply during the nineteenth century. And this is particularly the case for the scholarship on China. For example, missionaries such as James Marshman and Robert Morrison, although they successfully made it to China and later published their individual translated texts of the Confucius classics such as *Analects (Lun-Yu)* and *The Great Learning* (or, *The Great Science; Da-Xue*), failed to make impact either among the intellectuals or among the public as greatly as their predecessors³²². However, even though the amount of scholarship on the Orient tailed off, the Orient nevertheless appeared more accessible and indispensable to the general public. The Orient became one of the central elements in popular culture in the nineteenth century. In *The Moonstone*, for instance, a diamond from India works as a mysterious force that causes turmoil and chaos. The implicit association of the opium with the Orient again, like De Quincey's writings, is again explained in the story. In terms of chinoiserie, as Lamb states in his writings, these oriental (and oftentimes, Chinese) materials have reached the general public and have become daily accessible objects. Even though these materials still carried overtones of foreignness and strangeness to most Britons in the nineteenth century, the wide popularity and acceptability of these materials rendered the Chinese objects and aesthetics "the familiar exotic"³²³, as Elizabeth Hope Chang terms it. Chang defines the "familiar exotic" as "a sense of unbridgeable cultural

³²² Robert Morrison translated published many books on Chinese philology and pedagogy in the first few decades in the nineteenth century. His translation of the Chinese classics, *Horae Sinicae: translations from the popular literature of the Chinese*, was published in 1812. James Marshman was the author of *A Dissertation on the Characters and Sounds of the Chinese Language*, published in 1809. His introductory Confucius' works, *The Works of Confucius, containing the original text, with a translation and Clavis Sinica; Elements of Chinese Grammar, with a preliminary dissertation on the characters and the colloquial medium of the Chinese; and an Appendix, containing the Ta-Hyok of Confucius, with a translation*, were published in 1811 and 1814.

³²³ Chang, p. 6.

and aesthetic difference that is amplified, not diffused, by increased circulation and reproduction". The idea of the "familiar exotic", I will argue, is probably the reason why the decline of Sinological scholarship took place. The growing accessibility of Chinese materials in daily household and everyday cultural consumption made the exotic familiar. And as the exotic in the Chinese materials grew more familiar to the Britons in the nineteenth century, Chinese aesthetics were included in, domesticated and internalised by the British taste and value system. This corresponds to what Chang proposes in her book that the ways of seeing the connection between the British and the Chinese materials were closely related to growing imperial ambition. In the meantime, the "unbridgeable cultural and aesthetic difference" was channelled into broader economic and political concerns for British writers and intellectuals. This growing trend, for example, can be found in De Quincey's writings, in which he amplified his personal animosity against China (as well as the undistinguished Orient) to a greater level as he supported the British military actions in China and other Asian countries. After all, "China is understood through its aesthetic objects and the conditions of its seeing; whether the understanding is celebrated or deplored does not diminish that primary circumstance".³²⁴

This thesis covers from the period from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. Within these one hundred years, the images of China went through some most drastic and dramatic changes. The selected writers and their writings well corresponded to the major transition in this century. In previous research done by many scholars, Romantic Orientalism is always seen as a literary motif shared mainly by poets and best exemplified in poetry. I would like to conclude that Romantic Orientalism stretched beyond the usual chronological confines of the Romantic period. Romantic Orientalism is a cultural response to preceding debates over the essence of the Orient. The word "Romantic", therefore, should not be limited to this specific era only; instead, it should be used in a more generic sense where the Orient is widely and highly romanticised by the collaborative efforts of European merchants, missionaries, intellectuals, and even the general public. With these literary and cultural phenomena taking place with the accumulation of existent knowledge, the shaping of Romantic Orientalism was not done singlehandedly by one

³²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 7.

writer or one historical event alone; rather, it was a long and winding journey that could only be completed by a collective effort.

In the case of China, whatever purpose it was to serve, the mapping of China has been an even more complicated process, mainly because unlike most of the Asian countries at that time, China always had a strong presence. Whether described as a philosophical land where absolutism is used only as a way of better governance, or a land full of material goods with endless treasure, or even a land that provides fresh perspectives and distinctive aesthetics, China has never been politically subordinate to any other countries. In other words, despite the fact that the European world attempted to locate China, this eastern empire showed that it could not be easily charted. Apart from that, almost since its emergence as a country, China was a self-centred country. With the formation of the geo-political ideology that China is a kingdom in the middle of the world, China has always been proud of its own strength and heritage, and it seldom wholeheartedly embraces the exterior cultures. With its ruling domain covering a large percentage of East Asia, China has been self-contained in many ways. As the Europeans drew the inspiration from the old empire's long history and ancient wisdom, China never thought of borrowing from any exterior sources. This Sino-centric ideology has prevailed throughout the history of China, and it served as a strong mechanism to counter anything foreign. While Europe felt the need to fully and comprehensively comprehend the mysterious land, China refused to comprehend other parts of the world. This simply goes to show how Said's work does not fully distinguish the differences among all countries and regions. In terms of power hierarchy, even though China has been used to support the arguments by many European intellectuals to fit in certain contexts, it does not mean that China has been passive all along. In fact, not until the mid-nineteenth century did China suffer from its first failure in military defence with its European counterparts, and it was about the same time that the internal upheavals within China took place. Thus, although the transformations of China's image in this era did not take place *within* China but *outside* China, this project, however, is not an attempt to correct the alleged misconceptions about China or to simply scold the inaccurate British representations of China. Instead, this is an attempt to outline the significance of China's image in the European historical context and to add a Chinese perspective to the cultural-exchange process. This is a way, I hope, to transcend the oversimplified binary of power structure between

East and West and to retrieve China from the cultural obscurity that Europe has long placed it in.

This research project began about a year before the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 and reaches its finish line nearly a year before the London Olympic Games in 2012. After hosting its first-ever Olympic Games in 2008, China reminded the world of its overwhelming and breath-taking historical and cultural legacy with astoundingly beautiful performances. The spectacular and stunning scenes and designs accomplished by China during the Games took over the world's attention. At the closing ceremony, as part of the handover ceremony from Beijing to London, a double-decker bus that read "London-Beijing-London" came in. This is an appropriate metaphor for the long mutually complicated and paradoxical relationship between China and Britain. After its epic failure to guard its own frontiers and territories against its Euro-American counterparts in the second half of the nineteenth century, China has struggled to restore the reputation it once had. The cultural stagnation and the backwardness, along with the opposite of Western scientific progressivism, are the first things that come into minds to many Westerners. The political instability caused by the conflicts between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party, the Japanese invasion and the Cultural Revolution in the twentieth century further weakened China. Although towards the end of the twentieth century, after a few decades' dormancy, China began to play a more active role on the world stage as a stronger political and economic entity. David Porter sees the Games in Beijing as a way for China to "take an increasingly prominent—if not predominant—role in global political, economic, and cultural affairs in the twenty-first century."³²⁵ As the Olympic Games in Beijing summer 2008 and the World Exhibition in Shanghai in 2010 both demonstrated China's ambition to renovate and to exhibit its peculiar cultural and historical riches to the world, there are still some major issues such as democracy, human rights, diplomatic coercion and environmental degradation that the West finds highly problematic about China. Thus, as Porter points out, this rise (or re-emergence) of China as a world power "has already begun to occasion, in the West, complex and dramatically ambivalent responses that resonate unmistakably with those evoked by the emergence of China, and Chinese aesthetic culture, in particular, in English consciousness in the eighteenth

³²⁵ David Porter. *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England*. Cambridge: CUP, 2010, p.11.

century.”³²⁶ With this in mind, it poses an ultimate challenge for China: will China be able to really transcend the narrow model of the nineteenth-century Eurocentric progressivism combined with Orientalism? If seeking the “universal values” in the Chinese culture advocated by Enlightenment writers proved to be a failed attempt, can China offer the rest of the world a new perspective of examination in the twenty-first century? When Chinese society is more economically ready for Western capitalism, will it eventually embrace the Western democracy? And while anxiously endeavouring to meet Western expectations, will China lose its own peculiarity and become self-orientalising? These issues will undoubtedly become a major task for the Chinese government and the Chinese society in this century.

In the upcoming age, David Porter sees the time now is ripe “for a reconsideration of the historical dynamics of this encounter” between China and the world. In accordance with Porter’s comment, this research project is an initial step to display a possibility to approach China and to restore its full historicity that can account for both China’s unity and diversity in space and time. Although this research covers mainly from mid-eighteenth century to mid-nineteenth century, the Chinese cultural influence in Britain has spanned beyond the scope of the long eighteenth century. And, in fact, the Chinese taste is still alive today. From food to design aesthetics, the Chinese taste becomes more of an indispensable part in the everyday life, and it grows more commonly seen in whichever industry and plays a more significant role in global cultural economy. In academia, the topic of China is also gaining more attention as more intellectual collaborations endeavour to explore different aspects of it, which generates more momentum and dynamics to enhance and to reshape the Western understanding of China. After a long recess, China has gradually made its way back to the centre from the periphery.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

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